NEA Today
The Magazine of the National Education Association
January 2002

Thinking About Refinancing?
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Undivided ATTENTION

Connecticut's Wallace Claitty can focus on both his regular ed and special ed students. How?

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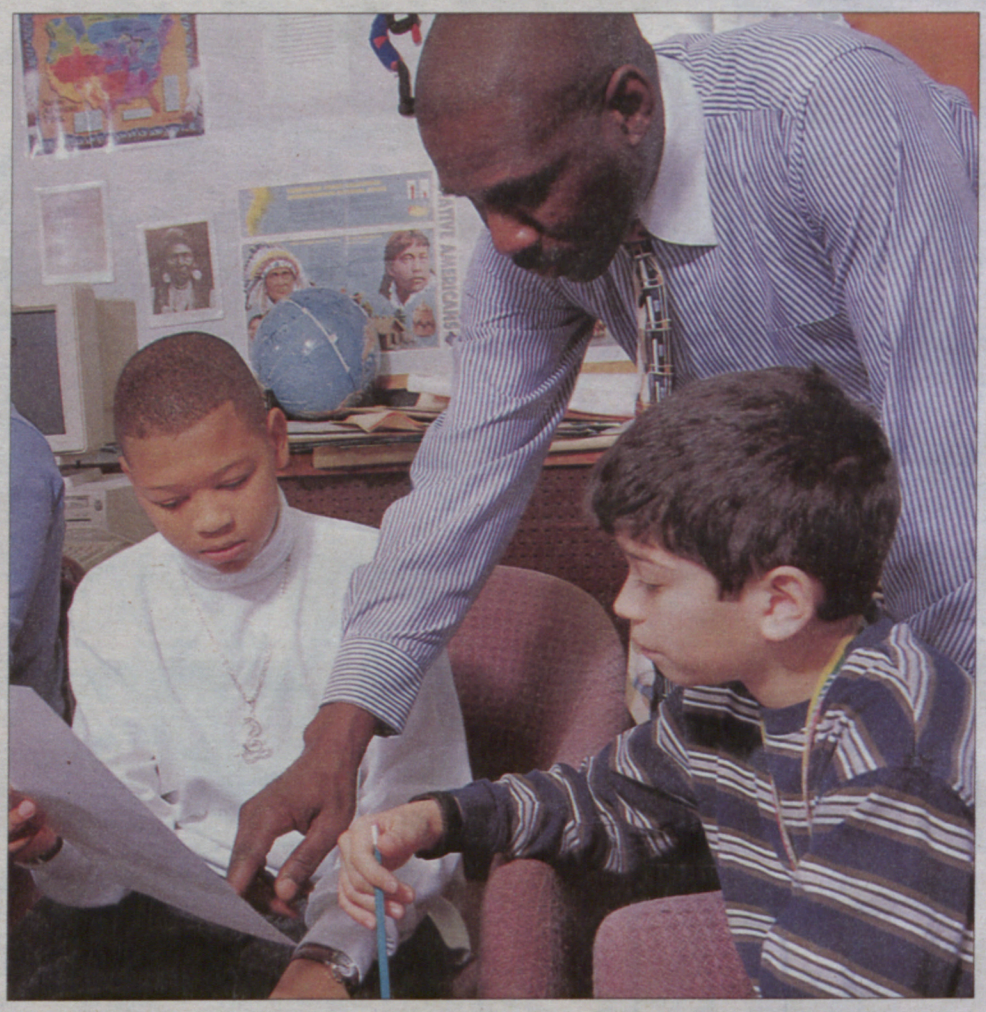

Jim Harrison

COVER STORY Inclusion by Design

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Some schools are reaping big benefits from their efforts to teach regular and special education students together. At Connecticut's East Hartford Middle School, teachers like Wallace Claitty (above) have created a school structure that promotes successful inclusion. And in Oklahoma, educators have beat back a major special ed obstruction—paperwork.

Cover photo by Jim Harrison

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Letters

VA, PA DESERVE SUPPORT

On September 11, I stood with my second grade students and watched smoke pour out of the Pentagon. I wept when finally I was able to turn on the television to see the events of the day at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania and New York. I grew up in Arlington. My home has been the target of a terrorist attack.

It crushed me when I got the November issue of *NEA Today* and read the headline, "We're All New Yorkers." I am not a New Yorker! I am a Virginian. I know that what New York has to deal with is horrible. I just wish Arlington and Pennsylvania weren't forgotten.

Annemarie Glover
Arlington, Virginia

TERRORISM AND HISTORY

Thank you to Elaine Akagi for her article about the parallels between the terrorist attacks and Pearl Harbor (My Turn, November). As a social studies teacher, I taught my students the comparisons. However, I also taught my students that we must learn from the internment of Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor. My students were able to see that our government was wrong, history cannot repeat itself, and that we cannot judge someone by how they look or where they came from. I encourage fellow educators to be sure to bring this perspective into the lesson when teaching these parallels.

Dianne McGee
Lewisville, Texas

CLEARING THE AIR

Thank you for publishing "Breaking the Mold on Air Quality" (News, November). I am on permanent disability with hypersensitivity pneumonitis after exposure to mold and dust in my classroom. In my district, at least 20 of the 35 schools have reported "hot spots."

One of the primary causes has been carpeting used in classrooms and elementary lunchrooms as well as inadequate ventilation systems. Nevertheless, administrators continue to put carpeting in classrooms instead of tile. And even newer constructions have poor ventilation.

I cannot walk a block without stopping to breathe several times. Two of my colleagues retired and continue to enjoy hiking and jogging. My golden years will not be very golden.

Elsie Cadena
Mead, Washington

CHILDREN'S CLASSICS

I enjoyed your article on children's classics ("What Makes a Classic?" November), and I'm glad to see *Eloise* on your list. It is a classic.

What disturbs me is the discriminatory marketing of the book *Eloise* and related licensed products. Every new book and every product is drenched in a nauseating shade of hot pink. By slapping a "For Girls Only" color code on *Eloise* you effectively bar future generations of boys from enjoying this classic. We should, instead, be encouraging boys to read books with girls the main characters,especially plucky girls who break traditional feminine stereotypes.

I urge librarians, teachers, and parents to seek out older copies of Eloise without the pink covers.

Cathy Taylor
Glenside, Pennsylvania

I always look forward to my copy of your publication to read about new trends in school.

Your list of "the best of classic books" was very interesting. Although I agree with your choices, I must say you left off a great classic series by P.L. Travers: *Mary Poppins* (not the Disney version).

This series was so full of gentle imagination and magic, as well as teaching proper behavior under the guidance of that perfect, often too-strict nanny.

I started reading these when I was a third grader and just last year purchased a newly published set of the four Poppins books (*Mary Poppins*, *Mary Poppins Comes Back*, *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*, and *Mary Poppins in the Park*).

What a treat to reread those delightful stories.

Marguerite Brockway
Amherst, New Hampshire

POEMS FOR THOUGHT

I found the article about Poet Laureate Billy Collins in *NEA Today* very interesting (Innovation, November).

I like the idea of giving high school students a poem a day.

I think high school is a bit late to start, though. I teach second grade and my second graders have already memorized four poems. They love doing this and their favorite so far is *Life* by Paul Lawerence Dunbar.

I'm teaching my students to read using a phonics-based language arts program, and I've already seen incredible growth.

Once they are able to read fluently, I'm sure they will be more interested in memorizing poems on their own.

Harry Onickel
Ferndale, Michigan

MARRYING FOR MONEY

Velma Stewart's strategy for teaching money management by "marrying" students (Innovation, November) is new and inventive? Funny, I know family and consumer sciences teachers that have been using this same strategy for *years*! However, when the FACS teachers used this strategy, they were ridiculed and told that their curriculum wasn't "academically challenging." Now the push in education is making curriculum "revelent to the students lives." Family and consumer sciences have always been perceived as the bastard child of education. But if you want to see the next trend in education, look to your FACS teachers.

Loretta Schuler
Bedford, Indiana

ENOUGH GUN LAWS

I was outraged to see in the November issue of *NEA Today* a full-page placed by "Americans for Gun Safety" touting the McCain-Lieberman "Gun Safety" Bill. I am a 30-year member of the NEA and also a member of the NRA. I am tired of seeing my dues to the NEA used to support the gun control agenda.

I am against the need of some groups to "federalize" issues to

CONFRONTING TERROR ABROAD

On September 3, 1993, I was awakened at 5:30 a.m. by a telephone call: "Terry, there's a bomb about to go off beside the school!" By the time I got there, the once-beautiful courthouse in our city of Armagh was in ruins and my school nearby was virtually uninhabitable.

A few months later, my early morning journey to school was interrupted by a radio news flash. One of our school parents had been murdered.

These are just two of the countless occasions in Northern Ireland when I and my colleagues have had to deal with the effects of the bomb and bullet on our children.

We are proud that our classrooms have, with few exceptions, been havens of compassion and caring, and the teacher a leader and an example of all that is good in human nature.

Teachers—on both sides of the community divide—have strived to maintain a degree of normality and consistency in the lives of our children, despite unbelievable tragedy and turmoil outside.

After the bombing in 1993, the children missed only one day of school. Lessons resumed in parts of the building while other areas were repaired. In the case of the murdered parent, we prayed for the victim in a school assembly and school continued. Teachers visited the grieving family at home. When the children returned, the whole community, staff and children alike, took on the responsibility to ease the transition back to school.

The challenges sometimes increase with time. On September 3, 1998, in front of the rebuilt courthouse, only yards from my school, five years after the bomb that caused such destruction, William Clinton and Tony Blair spoke to an audience of thousands. They encouraged us to turn the other cheek on the terrorist, thus eliminating his or her reason for being. All sides were to forgive and forget.

It was comparatively easy for me to take up this challenge. None of my relatives had met death at the hand of the terrorist.The three children who had lost their father were also in the audience. Turning the other cheek is not, I suspect, so easy for them. But they have been trying for eight years to do just that.

You, the educators of America, will have many challenges to meet in the coming months in helping to pick up the debris left in your streets and classrooms by terrorism. At some point, you will also have to answer the same questions I and those three children have wrestled with.

My thoughts are with you.

Terry Shields
President
Ulster Teachers Union
[Editor's note: UTU is one of NEA's partners in Education International, working to promote education worldwide.]

circumvent the state legislatures or the state voters. If 32 states have no background checks, then 18 must have some such laws. So work to have the states pass such regulations.

More federal gun laws are not the answer, nor will such laws make schools safer. I'd be more impressed if the NEA and other such organizations pressed for enforcement of existing gun laws and punishment for criminals who break the laws already on the books, which number in the tens of thousands.

Jim Bowden
Coos Bay, Oregon

DRESS ISN'T SUCCESS

I have been a teacher for three years and wholeheartedly agree with Fodie Mitchell (Debate, November) that student behavior and, for that matter, achievement is not necessarily better when I am dressed "better."

I think back to my days as a student and what my teachers wore. I remember a fifth grade teacher who dressed in designer, and I assume expensive, suits everyday. She looked wonderful but she never left her desk. She was dull and therefore, I did not learn much.

Dressed in jeans and a casual shirt, another teacher darted around the room intriguing students and interacting with them.

I think we should focus on a teacher's ability to teach and manage, and not on their attire.

Carla Ryder
Salinas, California

I retired after almost 30 years of teaching in elementary grades. I've found, at least in Arizona, that the kids display less of a rebellious attitude against authority if teachers dress cleanly, but casually.

I used to dress in business suits, nylon stockings, and business high heels twenty years ago, but if teachers dressed that way out here today I think it would come across as a sad attempt to establish superiority based upon an ill-preceived stress on "class" or economic status.

Bev Gibbons
Apache Junction, Arizona

Let's Talk

Share your ideas, comments, and opinions with *NEA Today* in one of five ways:

- By mail: Write to Letters, NEA Today, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- Through the Web: Go to www.nea.org/neatoday and click on "Submit a Letter to the Editor"
- By E-mail: Write to neatoday@nea.org
- By Fax: 202/822-7206
- By Phone: 202/822-7201

Letters are edited for length and clarity.

TEACHERS, PHONE HOME

I am surprised by Sheana Thorell's Letter to the Editor entitled "Embarrassing Students" in the November issue. She writes: "No human being deserves to be embarrassed and belittled." First, I do not understand how a parent phone call embarrasses a child. Second, if the child is acting up in class, he or she deserves some form of punishment, and if embarrassing the child by calling his or her mother or father right then and there does the trick, so be it. There are so few options left to teachers. I applaud Jarrad Grandy for calling parents immediately.

Bart Birdsall
Tampa, Florida

VIOLATING PRIVACY

As a parent of a learning disabled child and two non-disabled children, and as a learning disabilities teacher, I agree that allowing a non-professional to grade students' papers is a violation of privacy (News, October).

A far better answer for everyone involved would be to provide each teacher with a trained/professional classroom aide to help with the many tasks related to teaching.

A student's work is for the eyes of the professional educator only!

Angela Newmaster
Blue Springs, Missouri

PRESCRIPTION VICTORY

Thank you, thank you, thank you for your recent article on the "Viagra" ruling (News, October) in *NEA Today*! I shared the information with our district administrators and they have agreed to provide coverage for several forms of contraceptives. This change affects 500 people in our district and would not have occurred if not for the information contained in the *Nea Today* magazine.

Heather Miller
Barberton, Ohio

A BIT PART FOR TESTS

I appreciated Bob Chase's editorial on "Challenging the Almighty Test" in the October issue.

He, like most educators, realizes that these state tests need to be placed in their proper perspective instead of being used to turn schools into unAmerican robotic factories. Instead of taking center stage, they should be bit part players in the great play or movie we call education and real life.

Our education dollars should not be spent on shallow, arbitrary measures of teaching/learning. Rather, they could be better utilized to reduce class sizes, fix school buildings, build community partnerships, and supply schools with the materials they need to maximize student learning.

Christian Milord
Brea, California

President's Viewpoint

BY BOB CHASE

Can We Connect With Today's Parents?

Yes, but we'll have to be more creative. If parents won't come to us, we must go to them.

I have heard teachers say that some parents "just don't care about their kids' education." Likewise, some parents say that teachers "don't care."

But whenever NEA's Family-School-Community Partnership brings these mutually frustrated parents and teachers together in a room to talk with one another, we discover that both parents and teachers care deeply about "our kids" and only want what's best for them.

So I don't buy the "don't care" explanation. What I do buy, however, is the stubborn fact that there are real obstacles to parent-school cooperation.

Obstacle number one is diversity.

As student diversity grows, the teaching force remains overwhelmingly white, non-Hispanic, and middle class. Today, 35 percent of our students are minorities. By 2030, half will be minority. And throughout the 1990s, the number of students of immigrant parents surged. We now have schools where more than 60 languages are spoken.

Common sense dictates that families have changed, and so must we.

Rightly, we celebrate America's diversity. But in doing so, we must never forget that we still have to work hard at making diversity work. Language, racial, cultural, or class barriers are a fact of life. Indeed, teachers and education support professionals have told me that they feel overwhelmed and need help connecting with students and families from very different backgrounds than their own.

Common sense tells us that school districts should take school employees at their word and, through mentoring and professional development, provide staff with partnership-building tools and skills.

In addition, we need to make our schools less intimidating and more user-friendly for every parent.

Obstacle number two is time. The 2000 Census shows that many American families no longer resemble Ward and June Cleaver's family in "Leave It to Beaver." More children are growing up in households in which both parents work outside the home, or in households headed by a single, working mother.

Parents are crunched for time. A 1999 report by the President's Council of Economic Advisers found that American parents have, on average, 22 fewer hours per week at home than they had in 1969.

Again, common sense dictates that families have changed, and so must we. We must challenge employers to give employees at least two hours per month extra paid leave so that they can meet with a teacher or volunteer at a school. We also need to challenge employers to provide employees with more home time through programs such as job sharing, flextime, and telecommuting.

What's more, we need to hold parent-teacher conferences outside the school and at times that parents can make. We need to visit students' homes and, if necessary, their parents' workplaces. Moreover, we will need to bargain the additional time we need to reach out to families in these new ways. Teachers, after all, are crunched for time, too.

When schools and families work together to aid learning, student achievement soars. The evidence is beyond dispute. Test scores, attendance, homework, and report cards all improve measurably.

It is not enough that we tout family values. We must also value families by involving them in their children's education.

Comments? E-mail Bob Chase at BobChase@nea.org.

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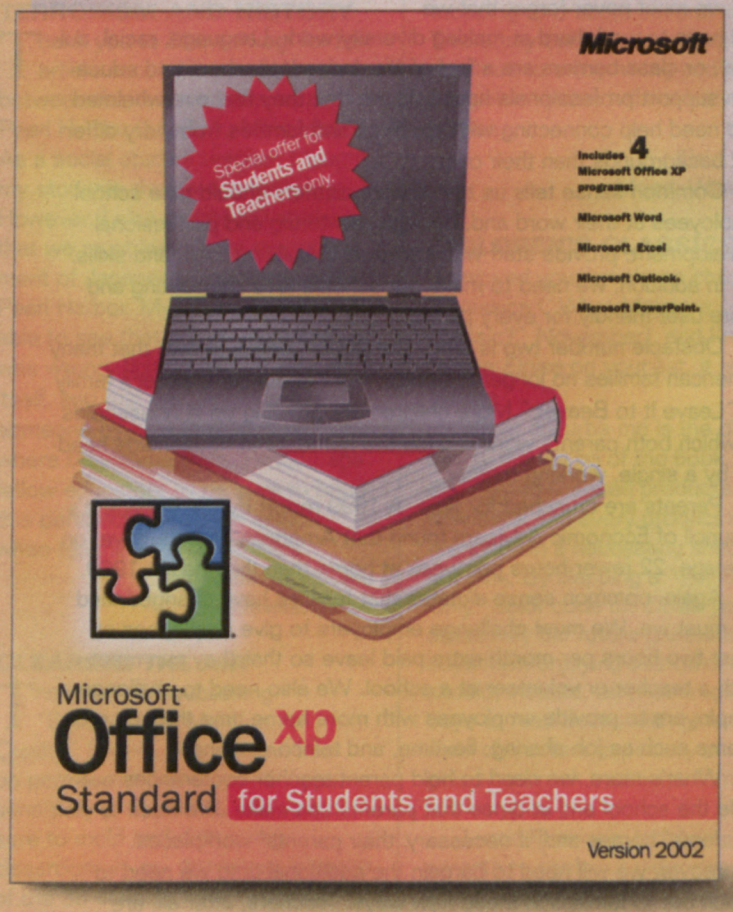

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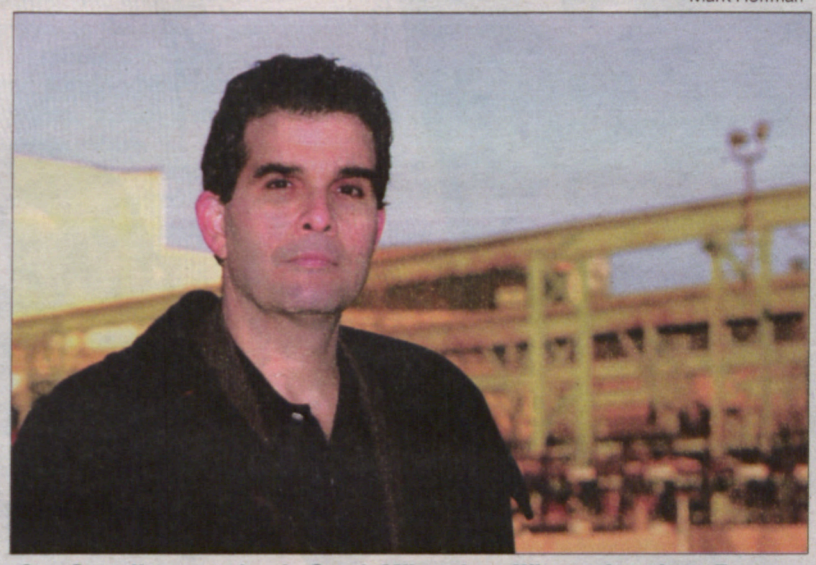
Save Jobs, Save the Children

A South Milwaukee elementary teacher fears for the future of children worldwide if the Free Trade Area of the Americas act becomes law.

BY GUY COSTELLO

Mark Hoffman



Guy Costello, a teacher in South Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Bucyrus Erie once employed 8,000. Today, just 1,000 work for BE.

"They're closing down the textile mill across the railroad tracks. Foreman says these jobs are going boys, And they ain't coming back to your hometown."

Those lyrics to a Bruce Springsteen song could apply to most any community in our nation that has experienced the social trauma caused by closed factories and lost jobs. In my hometown of Ithaca, New York, it was a shotgun factory and a company that made auto parts.

In your hometown it may have been a tire plant or a company that produced women's clothing. I am not an economist nor do I understand everything that can lead to economic down-turns. But I do know that a significant part of the blame lies with international trade agreements that promote free trade at the expense of workers, communities, and kids.

The Fair Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is a trade agreement—similar to NAFTA—that would give corporations free access to markets from Canada to Chile, with little or no government regulation or oversight. If Congress passes the FTAA and the President signs it, the agreement would take effect in 2005.

Why am I involved in issues like the FTAA, and why do I believe the NEA should oppose it?

My reasons start right here in South Milwaukee, where I live and teach. We have a factory in town called Bucyrus Erie. BE manufactures large mining and earth-moving equipment. About a century ago, BE built the huge steam shovels that were used to dig the Panama Canal.

Twenty-five years ago, almost 8,000 people worked at BE, many of them parents of students at our school. They made a union wage with union benefits. By the early to mid-1980s all that began to change. The reduction in the use of coal as an energy source played a part in the decline of jobs at Bucyrus Erie, but more significant were international trade policies that forced BE and others to lower wages or move jobs to Korea and South America to find cheaper labor.

Today BE employs fewer than 1,000 people in South Milwaukee. Thousands of good jobs were lost. Our students' parents, who once had union jobs and the benefits that go with them, now work in service jobs, and many barely make above the minimum wage.

Twenty years ago most parents had a good health plan for their families. Now they struggle to cover the cost of prescriptions or eyeglasses for their kids.

Twenty years ago parents made enough to buy a home and provide a secure income for the family. Now many families need help to pay for school lunches, and many children come to school without the books and materials they need.

I don't fault BE. The company has been and continues to be a strong supporter of our schools and community. I do fault policies that in the name of free trade exact a heavy toll on workers, communities, and children. This kind of free trade hasn't guaranteed freedom from poverty. It hasn't guaranteed free access to education. It hasn't guaranteed the freedom to join a union.

We have an opportunity to strengthen the labor movement by opposing the FTAA. Other unions have stood with us to oppose vouchers, to oppose paycheck protection, and to elect pro-public education candidates. This is our chance to return the favor and help clothing, auto, steel, and many other unions that have seen their memberships plummet due to trade policy.

As educators, we should oppose the FTAA because we care about children and their right to a quality education. FTAA offers no protections against child labor or guarantee of universal access to education. At last summer's NEA Representative Assembly, delegates learned the courageous story of Lieu Tran, who labored as a child in Vietnam and Cambodia. As Lieu said, she was one of the lucky ones because she escaped, but millions of children around the world are still forced to work to survive.

Children suffering because of child labor are not only in foreign lands. Each year, more and more of these children are showing up at our schoolroom doors.

My experience as a teacher and as a parent has taught me that all children, whether they live in South Milwaukee or Sierra Leone, Boston or Bogotá, Ventura or Vietnam, are our children—and it is up to us to stand up and fight for them.

I serve as Wisconsin's co-chair of The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education. I am proud to be part of this effort. But our work for children and public education does not end with raising money.

We should oppose the FTAA and ask our political representatives to do the same. Speaking out in defense of children is our business and responsibility. If we don't do it, who will? ✔

Guy Costello is in his 11th year at Lakeview Elementary, where he teaches a fourth-fifth multiage class. Costello also chairs the Legislative Committee of the Wisconsin Education Association Council.

By the time you read this column, the newly designed NEA Web site www.nea.org should be up and running.

It's been a massive effort, over many months and involving many NEA staff as well as outside Web experts. You'll want to check it out, and while you're there you'll also notice how the online version of *NEA Today* has been integrated into the main NEA Web site.

Bill Fischer
editor

There's a simple reason for this. As NEA's flagship publication, *NEA Today* covers education from the perspective of teachers and support staff who work in schools day in and day out. Our online presence recognizes this perspective.

The *NEA Today Online* also has a fresh look, but retains many familiar features. You'll see a whole new palette of color and updated and more readable typefaces.

Other changes include an improved search function that allows you to enter key words and access four years worth of the magazine.

NEA Today Online will also be easier to find from the main NEA Web site. Improved navigation will make it possible for you to get to NEA's main print publication from almost every page. To access *NEA Today Online*, go to: www.nea.org/neatoday.

Let us know what you think, and thanks for your patience during these past months while the site was under construction.

A final note about Web site listings in *NEA Today*. In two Fall issues, we listed Web sites hosted by two legitimate education organizations. Weeks later, we found out that both education groups had let their site licenses lapse, and two other non-education businesses had taken them over.

We do check out all the sites before they're listed, but unfortunately, Web site addresses and licenses do change frequently.

Bill Fischer

Inclusion by Design

At East Hartford Middle School, special education and regular education flourish in the same classroom. What's the secret?

Eighth grade voices—excited, but controlled—fill the room. Six groups of students are planning presentations on the Cherokee Indians' "Trail of Tears." One group scripts a play. Another produces a commercial to swing 19th-century public opinion against ethnic cleansing in America.

Wallace Claitty, social studies teacher at Connecticut's East Hartford Middle School, knows how to awaken his students' creativity. He moves between groups, making sure they stay on track.

What complicates an already complex learning situation is that each group includes a student with a disability serious enough to be covered by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Some read at a fourth grade level. One student can't write complete sentences. Claitty wants these children to participate fully without holding back his other students.

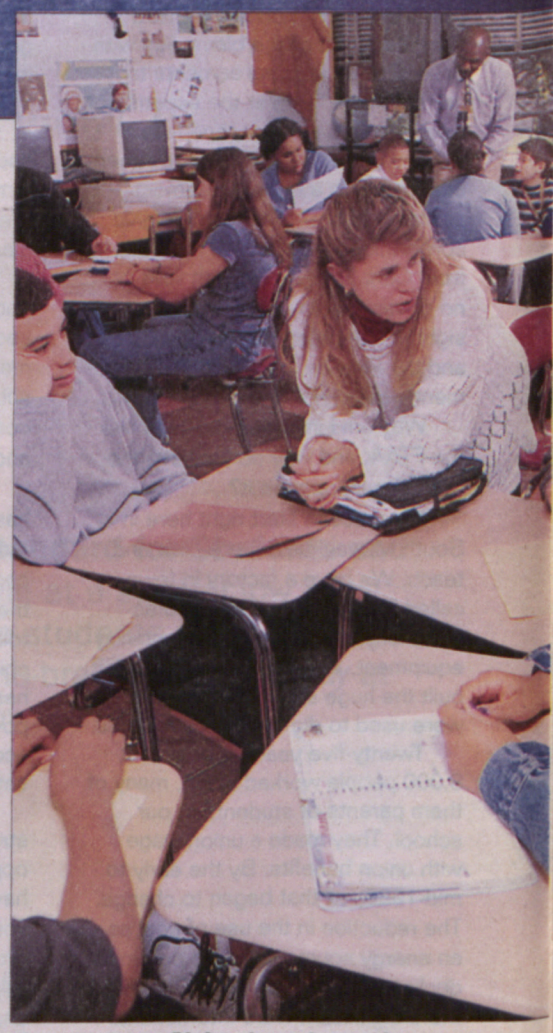
Across the country, about 11 percent of children are in special education. Regular teachers are trying to integrate them into mainstream classes. But many encounter a tangle of discipline problems and time-draining meetings, covered with layer upon layer of paperwork.

But here at East Hartford Middle School, IDEA is working. "All the children benefit from inclusion," says Claitty.

What's the secret?

It doesn't involve luck or serendipity. Educators looked at the challenges that inclusion poses and devised a cohesive plan to addresses them.

- The school is organized to help teachers get to know their students—a plus in any case, but certainly part of the foundation for successful inclusion. Academic subject teachers are grouped in teams, each sharing roughly 125 students. The teams have a common planning period every day.
- The school uses looping—teachers stay with the same students through grades seven and eight, and the greater familiarity that engenders helps them tailor lessons more precisely.
- And the critical factor: Claitty can pay full attention to one group at a time



Top: Wallace Claitty introduces the lesson. Above: Special education teacher Dawn Rinaldo-Newman works with one group while Claitty helps another.

because there's a second teacher in the room, special education teacher Dawn Rinaldo-Newman.

East Hartford is in its fifth year of "co-teaching"—inclusion for teachers. Each team includes at least one special education teacher.

Rinaldo-Newman works with her colleagues to develop the lesson modifications that "help some of the regular education students as well as the special education students," says Claitty. In the classroom, she provides individual instruction and sometimes introduces activities to the whole class. Not wanting to put the spotlight on her special education students, Rinaldo-Newman works with all the children, though some get more of her attention than others.

When Rinaldo-Newman first came to the school six years ago, she worked in the "special education wing," where children with a wide range of handicaps were lumped together. "They were looked at differently. There were fights in the building," she says. "Now, you can't tell the students apart. They look at each other as equals."

Some students who posed serious discipline problems when they were in separate classes now get their cues from regular education students and are doing much better.

But teacher inclusion has its own special challenges. "It's easy for kids to mix, but it's very difficult for two adults to go into the same classroom and work together," says Rinaldo-Newman. "Sometimes it takes years. Each teacher has a different philosophy, and mine doesn't necessarily match. Mr. Claitty's room is very relaxed, talking is good. But some teachers don't let kids talk at all. For their classes, I put on my traditional hat. Every period, I change hats. It makes you realize how hard it can be for the kids."

Like most successful programs, East Hartford Middle School's approach to special education is not rigid or absolute. It has evolved as teachers felt their way through the changes, and then brought parents along with them.

Most students with disabilities continue to take special reading and math courses. And not everyone is included in inclusion. Students whose problems are too severe are in separate academic classes—about 40 children in this school of 1,250.

The school's "gifted" and "extended" (above average) classes have very few special education children, although one team is trying inclusion in their extended classes.

East Hartford teachers also work through their union, the East Hartford Education Association, which sees improving inclusion as part of its work representing faculty. The Association has even called in Connecticut state authorities to press for more inclusion and more teacher involvement in planning.

"We want to collaborate with the administration," says Association President Cheryl Prevost, an art teacher at East Hartford Middle School. "But when we see situations that need to improve, we do what we have to do, for both children and faculty." ✔

—Alain Jehlen

Photos by Jim Harrison

For more: E-mail Wallace Claitty at wclaitty@easthartford.org or Dawn Rinaldo-Newman at drinaldo@snet.net.

Lisa Rudy Hoke

Third graders Keri Fuller (left) and Hannah Kinsey have learned to work together as they tackle their lessons.

Ways To Benefit All Students

In an Oklahoma school, less paperwork eases inclusion

At Lake Park Elementary School in Putnam City, Oklahoma, just outside Oklahoma City, inclusion is much more than simply placing Katherine Starrett's special education pupils in third grade teacher Becky Bell's class for part of the day.

"We help each other plan for each student," says Bell.

"For us," Starrett confirms, "it's never been a question of 'this is your child, this is my child.' No, it's everybody's child."

"What we do is like teaching reading with phonics and whole language combined," she adds. "It's not either/or. We get a happy mix."

Starrett is a member of NEA's IDEA cadre, a national network of 22 special educators who help their colleagues and have a chance to see how special education is handled or mishandled in many schools. Factors that have helped inclusion succeed in her school include

• Paperwork—or the lack thereof. Oklahoma doesn't pile it on, Starrett explains. "In some states, individualized education programs are 20 pages. In Oklahoma, IEPs can be kept to five or six." Less paper means, of course, more time to plan and to work with students.

• Class size is manageable. Starrett and a paraeducator have 12 special education students. Bell has 19 children including 7 with a range of disabilities.

• Starrett thinks school size is important, too. Lake Park has 350 students. "Our program couldn't be as successful at a larger school," she says.

• Many of the students are low-income, but they're not transient, so teachers—and students—aren't constantly trying to adjust to new people.

• Teachers enjoy the support of their principal. In her work with the NEA cadre, Starrett has met teachers who aren't as lucky. In those cases, "The faculty needs to pull together," says Starrett. "They need strong leadership."

Lake Park's nondogmatic, practical approach to inclusion is also critical to success, Starrett believes. IDEA isn't aimed at fully including every child, she says. "The question to ask is, 'How much time in the regular classroom is beneficial to that child?'"

Last fall, there came a moment when the teachers knew they were doing something right. Their students were playing kickball. One of Starrett's pupils was up. The other kids let him have nine kicks—because it was his ninth birthday.

This seemingly small gesture was a landmark, of sorts. The boy with the ball was one of several emotionally disturbed children integrated into Bell's classroom. These children have great difficulty getting along with both grown-ups and peers. So that moment of kindness on the court was not to be taken for granted, says Bell. It showed that the birthday boy had developed the social skills needed to earn a celebratory gesture from his classmates. And it showed that the regular ed students have learned a lot about accep tance and inclusion.

These students are mirroring the qualities of Starrett's and Bell's own partnership—cooperation, respect, and a determination to make things work. ✔

—Chris Bartolomeo

For more: E-mail Becky Bell at BBell@putnamcityschools.org or Katherine Starrett at KStarrett@putnamcityschools.org

Q&A

A Prom Photo: 'That's what IDEA is about'

Paula Goldberg heads the PACER Center, a federally funded agency whose mission is to help parents understand IDEA, and work effectively with teachers.

How did you get involved with IDEA and parents?

I was a teacher in the Chicago area before the federal law passed in 1975, and a third of my students had special needs, although they weren't identified that way. I took a course on "The Atypical Child" because I didn't have enough training.

Patricia Bill

When my own child was born, I chaired a study on special education for the League of Women Voters. Some of us went to the legislature and said parents need to help plan their children's programs. That was pretty revolutionary. We got a small grant to teach parents about their role under the law. We're still doing that.

What advice do you have for a teacher who feels he or she is not communicating well with a parent?

Call the parent at home. One-on-one takes time, but it is productive. It shows the teacher cares.

Families tell us that all they hear in school are the negatives. Sometimes they don't want to come to school because of that. Every person has strengths. Say to the parents, "Your child draws well, but we are having problems with this behavior. What can we work out together?"

Parents and teachers want the same thing. One parent called us from a phone booth. She didn't have a phone, and she had redeemed empty bottles to get the change to use the phone. No matter what the income level, parents want to help their children.

We also had a teacher who called us anonymously because she was afraid she would lose her job if her district found out. Teachers care.

What changes have you seen?

It's just amazing how far we've come. Prior to 1975, children with disabilities were often kept in institutions.

I have a picture on my refrigerator of a girl who had cerebral palsy—couldn't walk or talk. At age four, we helped her get a device with which she could press a button to say, "I'd like a cookie." After a year, she didn't need it anymore. She was integrated into a regular class and in second grade she was Student of the Month. The picture on my refrigerator is from her high school prom. She's planning to go to junior college. That's what IDEA is about. ✔

Resources

From the NEA

- *The IDEA Survival Guide* is one of the Professional Library's most widely used publications. *The Survival Guide* uses realistic scenarios and best-practice solutions to help teachers deal with a variety of issues related to students with special needs. It also contains a comprehesive list of print, electronic, and organizational resources. Call 800/229-4200 or go to www.nea.org/books.

The Survival Guide can also be downloaded free at http://home.nea.org/books/list.cfm?groupid=40.

- There's also useful information on the NEA Web site at www.nea.org/publiced/idea.

- The NEA's IDEA/Special Education Cadre is a group of 22 working educators with wide experience in special education who are available to help state and local Associations. Call 202/822-7404 or E-mail FNorthcutt@nea.org.

Other Resources

Several organizations have excellent Web sites. NEA works with many of these groups:

- The National Information Center for Children and Youth With Disabilities, www.nichcy.org.
- The Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights: www.pacer.org.
- The U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/.
- The IDEA Partnerships: www.ideapractices.org.
- The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association: www.asha.org.
- The American Occupational Therapy Association: www.aota.org.
- The National Association of School Psychologists: www.nasponline.org.
- The National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum, www.cast.org.
- The Learning Project—LD Online, www.ldonline.org.

Communicating with Parents

Working with parents can be one of the thorniest, yet most important and productive aspects of teaching children with disabilities. These are excerpts from the chapter on parents in the NEA Professional Library's IDEA Survival Guide.

Scene 1—Hands-on Parents

David's parents want constant updates: daily reports, weekly lesson plans, supplemental weekend materials, and end-of-month progress reports. With 27 other children in my classroom, eight of them with special needs, I just don't have the time.

If the reporting mechanisms David's parents are requesting are not in the IEP, you are under no obligation to provide all of them. Talk with David's parents: Are the reports they're requesting germane to IEP goals? Would they be satisfied with a modified version of their requests? Offer a number of options:

- Is it possible to send a quick E-mail or make a brief phone call rather than writing a daily report?
- Can you customize a simple check-off sheet to record David's progress? The categories might include on-task behaviors, task completion, social interaction, and class discussion.
- Can an annotated weekly lesson plan take the place of an extra report? You can note the modifications you're making for David.

If David's parents are inflexible, your administrator may be able to intervene. Point out to parents that an excess of paperwork and record keeping can interfere with teaching time.

If you cannot come to an understanding, contact your local Association. Your contract may allow you to grieve an unreasonable workload.

Scene 2—Hard-to-Reach Parents

I teach a student who is refusing to do her work. I've made repeated attempts to contact Amy's mother. She won't come in and seldom returns calls. She has not responded to the school's request for another IEP meeting. Can we hold an IEP meeting if Amy's mother is not present?

An IEP meeting may be conducted without parents if the school has made a good faith effort to convince the parents to attend. The school should keep a record of its attempts to arrange a mutually agreed upon time and place.

The team can make decisions about Amy's IEP without her mother's presence, especially if her goals and objectives remain essentially the same as those her mother agreed to previously. However, Amy's mother has the right to challenge decisions.

If parents don't agree to their child's IEP program within a certain time period, the school may choose to initiate due process procedures to induce the parents to make a decision.

Scene 3—Parents as Advocates

I'm so overwhelmed this year, I have to keep reminding myself why I chose this profession. My classroom is overcrowded and several students with disabilities have been placed in it. What can I do?

Parents can be your strongest advocates. When talking to parents, it's critical to communicate exactly what you need in the way of materials, time, or staff. Since parents are not answerable to school administrators, they can step forward even when teachers feel powerless. Needless to say, communication with parents should be diplomatic and professional.

Should teachers have the authority to remove disruptive students from their classes permanently?

TRACEY JONES SAXON
is in her fourth year teaching sixth grade at Walker Upper Elementary School in Charlottesville, Virginia. She is vice president of the Charlottesville Education Association.

yes

I have always been amazed at how people—teachers, parents, and administrators alike—sometimes get tunnel vision when it comes to disruptive students. In our constant efforts to make sure that every child has the "right to learn," the rights of some children get trampled by disruptive children. Disruptive students steal time. They steal patience. They steal the fun a lot of the time.

I had a parent say to me, "Why did you send my child out of your class? Sitting in the hall won't teach him anything! He has the right to learn, and if you don't let him stay in your class, I'll go to Central Office."

What about the other 20 kids in the room who were interrupted as I gave him three warnings and moved his seat? They have rights, too.

That parent never asked what the student was doing that made me give him a new seat and three warnings. The child's disruption was not the issue to the parent, but it was the major issue to me and my other students. Every time I stopped to deal with this one student, 20 kids lost their train of thought. Some children in that class had to really struggle to focus on their work. They were trying to stay with me, trying to participate, but they lost time and focus.

As teachers, our job is to help prepare our students for the real world—you have to follow rules. If you disrupt a movie in a theater, they don't give you three warnings and ask you to move your seat—they throw you out! If you do it enough times, you can be banned from returning. Kids need to know that. We need to help them, but we must also let the other members of our class "enjoy the movie," so to speak.

Classroom environments should have clear rules and expectations for everyone.

The decision to remove a child permanently should not rest on any one person. But the teacher should have the final say because he or she knows firsthand what the "disruptive child" can do to the learning of the other children.

Some disruptive students may have special problems, and they should receive special education services for those problems. But special education should not be a dumping ground for disruptive students!

I am talking about the child who refuses to stop talking, who bothers other kids, picks at things that don't belong to him or her, shows a general indifference to the educational process, and—this is the key—makes the choice not to follow classroom rules.

My father, a former teacher and administrator, gave me the best teaching advice: "Do what is best for your class. Always put the kids first."

I believe I am doing just that every time I make the decision to remove a disruptive child from my class.

A disruptive student's right to learn ends when it interferes with his classmates' right to learn. ✔

Geoffrey Smith

no

Our monumental task as educators goes beyond teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. We need to instill in children the social skills that will enable them to be productive in society. This can be the most frustrating task for new and seasoned teachers alike. We have many disruptive students. But much as we may want to send them on their merry way to the office, that will not teach them the essential social skills.

Sometimes the consequences we impose only make things worse. If the child's goal is to get out of class, sending him or her to the office only reinforces the behaviors you don't want. The child has associated acting out with getting out.

You may feel you have tried everything, but have you really? Are you doing this by yourself or are you receiving help from other teachers? Disruptive behavior is the result of a need. Find out what it is and try to meet that need. Ask other teachers whether the student acts the same way in their classrooms. If not, find out what is different.

In one case, we found by observing the classroom that the teacher was yelling at the disruptive student. He did not realize this, and after some simple suggestions, the classroom was fine.

It is not always so easy. By no means should you tackle the problem on your own.

Yes, if the behavior is totally out of control and the team has exhausted all possible interventions, then perhaps it's time to look at another less restrictive environment. But that should be a team decision. Usually, removing the child is not necessary.

In our school, three years ago, we started to use "student support teams" for all students with special needs, even those who have not been formally referred under IDEA. In the team, we talk about the reasons for the disruptive behavior. We bring in whatever help is needed.

Teachers come out of these sessions saying, "I learned an intervention that makes sense." They come back after trying the new approach saying, "This part is okay but I need more help in that area." And we work on it more.

We have cut the number of students referred under IDEA by three-quarters.

There was once a handsome little kindergarten student who gave his teacher a hard time. He would pester other students, disrupt the class, and basically frazzle the teacher to her wit's end. Then she found out the boy's mother had taught him all the skills he would need up to first grade. He was bored. So the teacher gave the student harder work. This simple modification kept him focused. He went on to fly helicopters in the U.S. Marines. Later, he became a teacher of special needs students. How do I know? The little boy was me!

Don't give up on disruptive kids. You never know which of them will go on to become teachers! ✔

NOEL RICHARDSON
is the student services coordinator at Ilima Intermediate School in Ewa Beach, Hawaii and a member of the NEA's IDEA cadre, which helps state and local Associations. He has worked in special education for six years.

What's Your Opinion?

Should teachers have the authority to remove disruptive students from their classes permanently?
To vote, visit our Web site at www.nea.org/neatoday.

Do students behave better when the teacher is well dressed?
The tally on this Debate question from the last issue of *NEA Today*:
62% Yes **38% No**

It's About Budget *Priorities*, Not Shortfalls

In spite of a recession, Virginians push for proper school funding.

Eric Brady

Kindergarten teacher Jess Tucker and many other Virginia NEA activists have met with local policymakers to outline the state's flawed education funding formula.

The recession has arrived, and many state governments are facing billion-dollar-plus budget shortfalls. While legislators are trying to protect direct school aid for the current budget year, educators and students could—if the economy continues to stagnate—face painful cutbacks in Fiscal Year 2003.

The Commonwealth of Virginia is a typical budget basket case, facing a revenue shortfall that could reach $1.5 billion by the end of FY 2002.

Worse yet, Virginia, the state that ranks 15th in the nation in per capita wealth, ranks 45th in per capita state support of public schools.

Imagine the mood of Virginia NEA members.

Then imagine how educators feel in Bedford County, the Virginia district with the lowest rate of per-student expenditure. They push hard to meet tough state "Standards of Learning," yet must contend with inferior pay, growing class sizes, and a shortage of new educators and technology teachers.

Well, you'd never imagine this: Teachers and ESP in Bedford County and across the Old Dominion State are hard-pressed but *proud*, thanks to an innovative "Brighter Futures" campaign now being conducted by the Virginia Education Association/NEA.

The campaign objective: Make education a permanent priority in the Virginia state budget—no matter what the economic climate.

Every VEA leader at every level, from VEA President Jean Bankos to Bedford County Education Association President Jess Tucker, is taking a single message to politicians and the press: Virginia has raised standards for student achievement, but not the standards for *funding* that achievement.

At every opportunity, these leaders are outlining flaws in the state's current education funding formula and connecting *quality funding* to decently paid *quality teachers* and *quality programs*—which hinge on factors like class size, reading, technology, school construction/repair, and supplies.

"The Brighter Futures campaign is not about revenues and shortfalls, it's about priorities," stresses VEA Executive Director Jerry Caruthers, "and it focuses all of VEA's major programs around this one issue."

How does a major NEA state affiliate conduct an integrated campaign for quality school funding? Here's a step-by-step guide from VEA:

1. Do your research. "Because Virginia is a non-bargaining state, technical research and analysis is an important tool in the legislative process," notes VEA Director of Finance and Research Ralph Shotwell. "We use our research on finance to effectively keep the issue in front of policymakers."

VEA research is a quality product. School boards and other educational groups often adopt it for their own use.

And VEA's findings on education funding flaws virtually parallel those just released by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC), a highly respected state watchdog agency.

The bottom line, concludes the commission, is that over the 2002-04 biennium, the state will have to pay $1.06 billion more to adequately fund its public school standards.

The commission "has done an excellent job in reporting funding system deficiencies," says Shotwell. "It's in line with what VEA has said for the last 30 years!"

2. Publicize your research. Through Brighter Futures media spots and regional press conferences, VEA has hammered home its message that the

Pro-Education Governors Elected

Sure, the recession's here—that's the bad news. But the good news is that two new pro-education governors were elected in November, thanks in no small part to the hard work of NEA state affiliates.

Here's a report from the field:

• "The **Virginia Education Association** recommended three statewide candidates and two won," reports VEA Government Relations Director Rob Jones, "and two-thirds of our recommended candidates won in House races."

VEA's winning pick for governor, Democrat Mark Warner, will be joined in Richmond by Lieutenant Governor-elect Tim Kaine, another strong advocate of public education.

"With Mark Warner elected as governor," says VEA President Jean Bankos, "we'll have a new era of cooperation and respect for public school educators and a new vision of where we need to go and how to get there."

While Virginia's new legislature will be strongly conservative, "VEA backed 12 winning Republicans in the House," Jones notes. "They're good friends and we're hoping for the formation of a pro-public education coalition."

• The **New Jersey Education Association's** recommended candidate for governor, Democrat Jim McGreevey, defeated conservative Republican opponent Bret Schundler by a 56-42 margin.

Schundler, a promoter of private school vouchers and tuition tax credits, was no match for McGreevey, who campaigned for improvements in public education—from a paperwork reduction to more teacher time with students.

After his win, McGreevey sent NJEA a message of thanks for its support and its "unwaivering commitment to making public schools work and work well.

"I look forward," he added, "to working together to ensure that all children have access to a quality education."

NJEA members' campaign work also helped elect a pro-education majority in the state Assembly. Said one NJEA-recommended candidate, Republican Assemblywoman Rose Heck, "Without NJEA efforts in Cliffside Park, I would not have been re-elected." ✔

education funding mechanism is broken and that "quality programs and quality teachers require quality funding."

Say it often enough, and people listen. Editorials across the state have begun to sound like VEA releases.

"Maybe our state lawmakers ought to be subjected to a Standards of Learning test and asked if they see any relationship between low salaries and teacher shortages," muses the Newport News *Daily Press*. "Talk of educational reform by candidates in the absence of money to keep that pledge will be very, very cheap."

3. Put politicians on record. In media spots before the November elections, VEA urged voters to "ask your candidates what they'll do to bring brighter futures to Virginia's children—and listen carefully to their answers."

"Both the general public and members of my local Association, a number of whom are Republicans, appreciated that these ads didn't support one candidate over another," notes Jess Tucker.

VEA did, in fact, recommend candidates from both parties, but no one got a free ride on the school funding issue. "We made it a big part of the gubernatorial debate," says VEA Government Relations Director Rob Jones.

4. Get local leaders to speak out. Using research, talking points, and overheads prepared by VEA, local leaders are now making Brighter Futures presentations to local policymakers and an array of community groups.

In Bedford County, Tucker, a kindergarten teacher at Huddleston Elementary, has reminded the county school board and board of supervisors that "county funding of schools has dropped by 25 percent over ten years," thanks to cuts in state aid.

In neighboring Amherst County, local affiliate President Bev Jones has also addressed county officials. And she's been working with her 234 members to spread the Brighter Futures message in businesses, churches, malls, home football games, parent-teacher conferences, and back-to-school nights.

"We're talking about needs like new teachers and textbooks," reports Jones, a U.S. history and advanced reading teacher at Monelison Middle School in Madison Heights. "We have reading books that are eight or nine years old. We can't send them out for 'adoption' because we still need them.

"The school board is pleased with our campaign effort, because what we do helps them," Jones adds. "Moreover, they can use VEA's talking points and research in lobbying legislators."

5. Seek allies. The Virginia Education Association has received NEA help through research assistance and funding for media spots.

And VEA is active in the newly formed Virginia Education Coalition, which unites school employees, school boards, administrators, and the state PTA. That alliance has just crafted a blueprint of educational goals for Virginia.

"We're also going to citizens' groups—from the Rotary to the Chamber of Commerce—at every opportunity and conducting interviews with corporate CEOs around the state," says VEA Exec Caruthers. "We hope to have the CEOs by our side as we lobby our new legislature and pro-education governor, Mark Warner, using the JLARC report."

6. Don't forget the feds. Federal aid to states increased sharply in the early 1990s, providing a big boost to state budgets. But since then, revenue from Washington as a percentage of total state and local revenue has declined from 23.3 percent to 22.2 percent.

"If IDEA costs were fully funded by the federal government, it would take a tremendous burden off localities," argues Caruthers. "We've got to get Washington to pay its fair share, for everything from special education to school construction and repair." ✔

For more on the recession's impact on the ability of states and districts to fund education, go to www.nea.org/topics/edfunding/recession.pdf.

PRESS CLIPS

"The Virginia Education Association is right that it's time for Virginia's leaders to seek ways the state can provide money to help local school districts compete. If few others are prepared to talk about it, there's no reason the teachers shouldn't."

—Editorial in the *Bristol Herald Courier/ Virginia-Tennesseean*

Heroes & Zeroes

▲ **The arts are an essential part of education, and children involved in the arts do better in math, science, and reading, actor Ed Asner recently told a group of Wisconsin NEA members.**

AP/Wideworld

Crediting his own teachers for incorporating arts into his education, Asner joked, "You can blame the Kansas City, Kansas school system for my appearance here today."

Asner expressed concern that the federal government, consumed by the war against terrorism, might ignore funding for education—especially the arts. That would be a shame, he said, because "artful education is one of the sources of strength in a free society."

▼ **In Hicksville, New York, Deputy Superintendent Maureen Bright reprimanded high school math teacher Karen Werfelman for missing two days of work, even though she had followed district procedures. Werfelman, you see, was called to the World Trade Center site right after September 11 because of her special expertise as a volunteer firefighter.**

When Werfelman told Bright she was worried about saving lives, the administrator replied, "Well, are you worried about your paycheck now?" Bright said she expected the math teacher to be at work, even if she was called to duty again.

▲ **On November 14, ESP Day, 2,000 teachers in Salem, Oregon, wrote thank-you notes to 1,700 ESP colleagues. Some notes had a "star" sticker entitling the recipient to a free pie. Respect: It's easy as pie.**

BASICS FOR BEGINNERS

How to Fight for Funds

Want to get *your* state government to pay its fair share of education costs? Here's some free advice from staff and local leaders of the Virginia Education Association/NEA:

- **Start hoarding information on everything from compensation to class sizes.** "Get comfortable with collecting data at your school district offices," says VEA Director of Finance and Research Ralph Shotwell, "and don't neglect to ask for assistance from your local UniServ office."
- **Be professional with local policymakers.** "Take the high road," advises UniServ Director Lanny Lambdin. "Thank local purse-string holders when they attempt to support school programs and pay decent salaries in spite of state underfunding. Then ask them, 'How can we work *together* to get more from the state?'"
- **Run a grassroots campaign.** If an education funding campaign is run from the top down, it'll soon go belly-up. "NEA members and local leaders need *ownership* in an education funding campaign before they'll jump on board," stresses Lambdin. "Educate members first on flaws in school finance, and they'll take it from there."
- **Dig in for the long haul.** "Keep your focus on the vision of equitable school funding," says Shotwell. "Deal with things in increments and don't lose sight of your goal."

"Never give up," adds Bev Jones, president of the Amherst County Education Association, Inc. "Never get so disgusted that you disappear. And keep speaking out!"

Prescriptions for Budget Busting

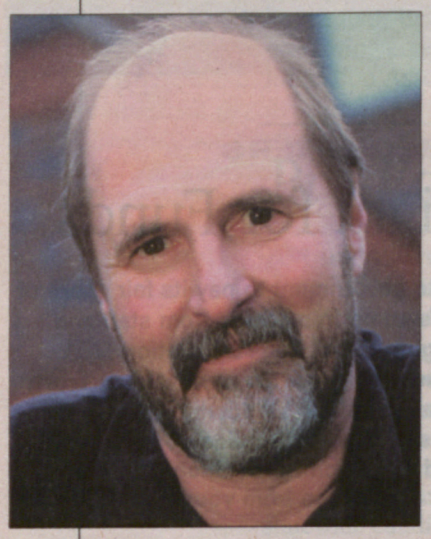
Educators confront spiraling health costs led by drug price hikes. It's time to boost *buying power.*

Warren Baab holds a job you might envy. In the rural calm of Idaho's Whitepine Joint School District No. 288, he shuttles between Bovill Elementary and Deary High School to help teachers and students work with new technology.

Baab is pleased to work for a district that "has a strong commitment to education" and that offers a video editing class in a rural high school that graduates just 20 students a year. And he's proud of his technical set-up at Deary High, including a school TV station and a digital video editing lab.

But Baab is aware that this technology, while crucial, is expensive. And he's keenly aware that his district "needs to do even more to assist kids from different backgrounds and knowledge bases," while offering instructional programs that are "relevant, motivate, and reduce frustrations."

But each time Baab, the president of the Whitepine Education Association, goes to the bargaining table, he sees fewer bucks in the "one pot of money" that pays for everything from pencils to programs.



The top of that pot is sinking from state aid cutbacks, and the bottom is leaking lots of change to school employee health care costs—which, Baab reports, shot up by "just" 13 percent in the last school year.

Baab and his superintendent are worried. They know that district employees have already sacrificed by accepting higher health care co-pays and deductibles, but health costs keep spiraling upward, due in no small part to skyrocketing prescription drug costs.

If drug prices continue to increase at an annual rate ranging between 14 and 18 percent, educators' prescription plans—many of which already have three tiers of co-pay prices—could be shunted to "co-insurance" plans requiring a larger percentage payment.

"People, especially those who take medications on a regular basis, think about the price of these drugs without a reasonable co-pay and it scares them," says Baab. "We need to address rising prescription drug costs quickly."

"People think about the price of those prescription drugs without a reasonable co-pay and it scares them."
—School technology coordinator Warren Baab

National Problem, Local Solutions

Even before the September 11 tragedy, health insurance rates were climbing due to factors like drug costs, higher physician/hospital costs, and industry pressures for profitability.

But when those hijacked airliners hit their targets, "the insurance industry's three largest reinsurers lost 30 to 40 percent of their wealth in one day," says Mike Gibler, a salary and benefits specialist for NEA's Illinois affiliate. "Everyone else down the line will now pay that money back, which means a severe load on premiums."

Across the country, NEA state affiliates are confronting the health cost crisis in unique ways. Just two examples:

- Illinois educators are facing health costs projected to rise by at least 15 percent a year over the next 5 years.

Faced with $11.6 million in debt, the state's second-largest school health insurance consortium went bankrupt last summer, forcing 100 participating districts to scramble for new coverage.

Worse yet, 40,000 members of the state's Teacher Retirement Insurance Program have been notified that their plan will not have enough revenue to pay claims starting January 1.

In response, the **Illinois Education Association-NEA** is formulating an emergency legislative program to strengthen the health care purchasing power of school employers.

The plan, now under discussion by IEA-NEA leaders, would mandate the formation of large regional insurance purchasing groups, each including active and retired educators. Each of these state-regulated groups would offer a set of core, quality benefits and be run by an employer-employee control board.

- In the Keystone State, where sharp health cost increases have produced tough bargaining and strikes, the **Pennsylvania State Education Association** has teamed up with administrators, school boards, and the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers to create a jointly run health care trust.

This self-insured plan, now at 6,000 members and growing, focuses on labor/management cooperation and delivery of standardized, quality care.

What NEA Is Doing

Not every NEA state affiliate can deal with the health cost crisis alone. NEA

THE BOTTOM LINE

RED-TAPE BLUES: School administrators say the bureaucracy accompanying mandated government education programs impedes their efforts to improve schools. www.publicagenda.org/specials/leadership/leadership.htm.

DROP-OUTS: High school completion rates are rising in the U.S. overall, but kids from low-income families are six times more likely to drop out than their peers. http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub_2001/.

COMMUNITY ACTION: A new guide outlines six specific strategies or interventions that local education funds have used successfully to make lasting improvements in their school districts. www.publiceducation.org/interventions/.

TESTING: Five leading education groups say states are unprepared for the testing requirements in the federal education bill and have issued a report offering guidelines for effective tests. www.naesp.org/comm/prss10-23-01.htm.

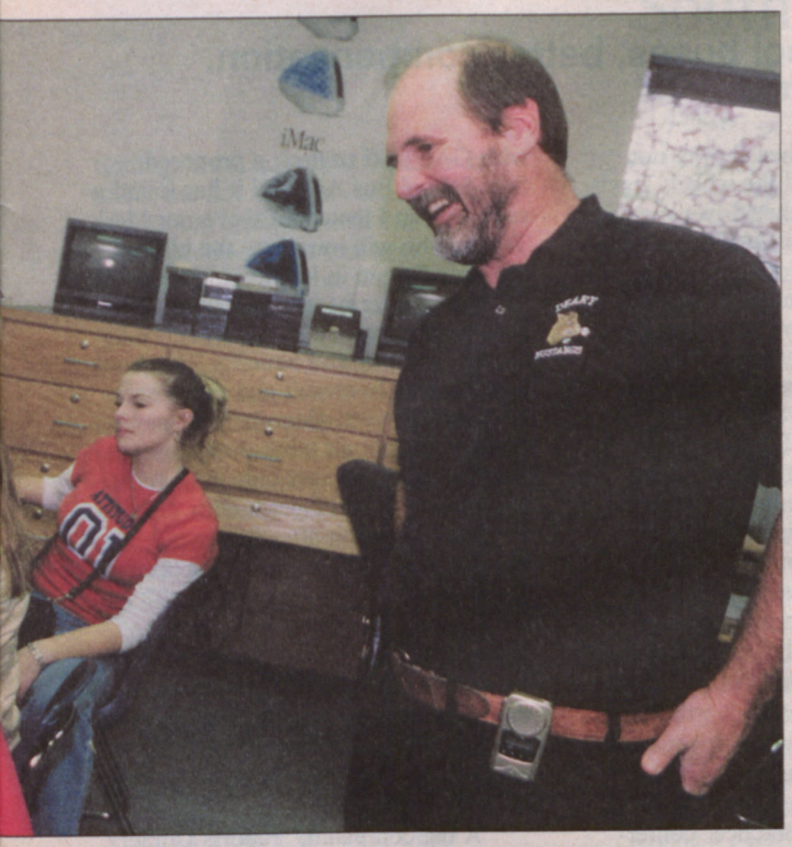


Photo by Jesse Tinsley

Warren Baab, here in the digital photography lab, notes that "when administrators and teachers work together on health care, we can build stronger relationships in other areas."

can assist affiliates through health care expertise, bargainer training, conference planning advice, and help with legislative efforts and coalition work.

Moreover, NEA and the American Federation of Teachers have formed a strong health care partnership that has yielded bargaining conferences, joint publications, and groundbreaking strategic research by the Lewin Group, a leading health care consulting firm.

The Lewin findings, based on the study of four states with statewide insurance programs for education employees, offer NEA state affiliates a comprehensive list of best practices and a "framework" for effectively purchasing health care on a large-group basis.

"The theory that underlies this project is that in health insurance, bigger is almost always better," notes the Lewin Group report. "By banding together, education employees will increase their purchasing power relative to their prior smaller groups."

Other benefits of "pooled purchasing," the report stresses, include the spreading of risk over a large group and cost predictability—plums that spur price competition among insurers.

"Sometimes, there are local market conditions—like some current members' physicians not being available to participate in a new plan—that prevent creation of a larger health care purchasing group," concedes Stan Wisniewski head of NEA's Office of Compensation and Collective Bargaining.

"But an option NEA strongly recommends," he adds, "is to get a handle on drug costs by creating larger 'carve-out' pharmacy benefit groups, separate from smaller, existing medical plans." This offers the advantage of drug purchasing leverage, spreads the risk, and gets people used to working together in larger groups—while making them comfortable about exploring what else they can work on together.

Side Benefit: Stronger Relationships

NEA local leader Warren Baab is already comfortable about "working together" for quality, affordable care.

In October, Baab and his superintendent, Daryl Bertelsen, attended a health care conference jointly sponsored by their health care consortium and the Idaho Education Association, with planning assistance from NEA.

There, superintendent-union teams from 85 districts heard about the Lewin Group framework for health purchasing and pondered a direction for Idaho health care.

Whether or not Idaho educators seek a single statewide health plan is a matter for democratic debate.

But Warren Baab knows one thing for certain: "Where administrators and teachers see common problems and work together educationally, the 'us versus them' starts to become just 'us.' By working more together on health care, we can build stronger relationships in other areas." ✔

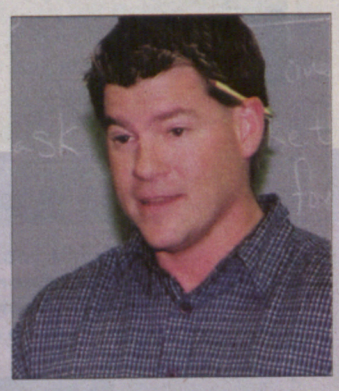
For information on how to compare and choose health care plans, go to www.healthchoices.org.

Start counting those pills

In 2002, predicts the Aon Corporation, a leading "risk management" and reinsurance consultant, HMO insurance rates will increase by 13.6 percent, PPO (preferred provider organization) rates by 16.4 percent, and pharmacy rates by a whopping 22.3 percent.

Do'ers Profile

CHRIS LARSON



■ ***Name and profession:*** Chris Larson, teacher of block classes of reading, language arts, and U.S. history at Gateway Middle School, Everett, Washington.

■ ***NEA local affiliate:*** Everett Education Association.

■ ***Don't roll with the punches:*** When Larson got his first paycheck this year, the out-of-pocket cost for his family medical, dental, and vision insurance premiums zoomed from $45 to $414 per month. Not willing to "roll with the punches," he encouraged co-workers to contact legislators and personally took the issue to State Representative Aaron Reardon (D-38th).

Larson didn't stop there. Although not previously active in his local Association, he called both the district and the union—and learned from EEA President Kim Mead that when the Everett contract expires next year, the local will be able to bargain over increased premium coverage.

■ ***Roll the presses:*** A year's a long wait, so Larson took his story to *Everett Herald* reporter Eric Stevick, who wrote about the teacher's plight—a $4,000 annual pay cut—and the district's reasons for hiking premium costs, including higher fees to medical providers and increased prescription costs.

■ ***And keep rolling:*** Count on Larson to keep the health cost issue alive. "This affects the morale of teachers," says this sixth-year teacher, "and it trickles down to the kids. The most important thing we can do is demand competitive wages to attract and keep teachers longer than five years."

(Thanks to the Washington Education Association)

STUDENTS ON LINE: In 1999, 91 percent of U.S. eighth-graders attended schools with networked access to the Internet. Internationally, only 41 percent of eighth-graders are on line at school. http://nces.ed. gov/.

TEACHER QUALITY: Broad research finds that teacher knowledge is more important to student achievement than any demographic factors. www.principals.org/news/bltn_tch_qul_stdnt_ach1101.html.

CONDUCT: A Florida study of often-disciplined students found that all had reading comprehension scores below the 25th percentile. Students admitted misbehaving as a coping strategy to avoid reading. www.nsdc.org/library/ jsd/ taylor224.html.

REVERSING RISK: Research suggests that vulnerable, inadequately served youth can transform their lives when exposed to cost-effective school programs that offer them enhanced support. www.publiceducation.org/ health/resources/youth.htm.

'We All Face the Same Issues!'

Georgia drivers to lobby for safer school buses, better compensation.

Gary Meek

Jill Travis is one of several ESP activists who tour Georgia to talk up unity and Association membership. Travis's message: "You're not alone out here."

They're underpaid, get a pittance for a pension, and are shut out of discipline and safety decisions by administrators. And until recently, a certain group of school bus drivers in rural northwestern Georgia thought nobody else knew this or *cared.*

But then these education support professionals met Jill Travis, an 11-year driver from Rockdale County in the populous Metro Atlanta region.

To the drivers' surprise, Travis knew their issues well and could speak about legislation now being proposed by the Georgia Association of Educators/NEA to address those concerns.

"You thought you were all alone out here," this suburban driver told her rural colleagues. "But you see you're not alone. We're all facing a lot of the same issues, and we can either address them through many little whispers or one big voice."

When they're not behind the wheel, Travis and other driver members of GAE's statewide ESP Committee take this unity message and a GAE membership appeal to transportation employees across the Peach State.

ESP organizing isn't easy in Georgia's non-bargaining environment, but it is producing real momentum.

That movement is evident in everything from the reinstatement last spring of an unfairly terminated North Fulton County bus driver to the consensus that has emerged from GAE-run "best practice" conferences and occupational meetings for ESP across the state.

"Best practice" feedback on the needs of all kinds of ESP—from paraeducators to food service employees—has given the ESP Committee an incredibly strong sense of direction.

Now that panel, chaired by Travis, aims to put its data to work through legislative initiatives on behalf of each ESP constituency group.

First at bat: GAE's growing force of bus drivers. The committee has worked with GAE staff to draft a proposed Safe School Bus Act, and it has found a supporter in Lieutenant Governor Mark Taylor, who will introduce the bill in the state Senate in January.

In broad terms, the proposed legislation addresses:

• **Better pay and benefits for school bus drivers.** To recruit and retain safe, dedicated drivers, Georgia must pay these professionals what they're worth.

At present, drivers only get a retirement benefit of $12 per month. "That's just $360 a month after 30 years," fumes Travis. "What's left after taxes and health benefits are taken out?"

• **Strong bus safety standards.** Georgia drivers are calling for improvements like uniform disciplinary standards and procedures, student codes of conduct, maximum seating capacity, and monitors on buses with high rates of student discipline.

"A big complaint," reports UniServ Director Mark Perez, "is that when drivers go to administrators with disciplinary problems, they get little or no support. Too often these professionals are considered 'just drivers' who have nothing to do with educating a child."

"Metro Atlanta drivers are particularly concerned about safety," adds Jill Travis. "They deal with a lot of traffic and car drivers who 'can't see' a school bus. And too often, a child who's a model student inside the building can become disruptive when he's stuck for 20 to 40 minutes on the bus with an audience. We'd like input in discipline."

• **Better bus equipment, from automatic mirror defrosters to air condi-**

KUDOS TO. . .

. . . Education support professionals in The Dalles, Oregon, who have finally become part of the NEA family after three representation election attempts over 11 years. By a 68-18 margin, they voted in the fall to affiliate with the Oregon Education Association.

It wasn't a hard choice to make. The ESPs' old bargaining agent had offered them neither solid information nor a real voice during their own contract talks, while OEA-represented Dalles teachers were steadily becoming more empowered and assertive.

"Support professionals were saying, 'We'd be where teachers are right now if we had OEA training and representation," notes UniServ Consultant Catherine Alexander.

Now The Dalles ESPs will have their chance to grow. At press time, they held their first real union meeting, formed elections and by-laws committees, and received Association training to represent themselves effectively at the bargaining table. Stay tuned.

. . . Nurses in the Delaware Division of Public Health and Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill have negotiated a non-salary agreement that improves, among other things, the hours of training, disciplinary rights, and malpractice reimbursement. Moreover, public health nurses have prevented the imposition of a longer workday and workweek, while DHCI nurses have doubled their annual uniform allowance—from $75 to $150—and made the holiday selection procedure both fair and equitable.

tioning. On a breezeless summer day under the hot Georgia sun, the interior of a school bus can reach 125 degrees, even with doors and windows open. "Special needs children definitely need air conditioning," Travis says, "and older drivers just can't deal with that intense heat."

• **Driver access to critical student information like prior disciplinary records and medical needs.** "Drivers now don't have the right to know about a child's ailments because administrators think they'll gossip about them," notes Perez. "But these professionals can be held just as accountable for con-

"We can address our issues through many little whispers or one big voice."

—School bus driver Jill Travis

fidentiality as teachers."

"I'm not going to share that confidential information. I just need to know," stresses Travis. "What if a child is prone to an asthma attack during an emergency bus evacuation? I need medical details to give EMTs, so they can check on certain kids in an emergency."

• **Non-retaliation guarantees for bus drivers.** Across Georgia, Travis hears about retaliation against drivers who complain to superintendents or transportation directors about bus safety problems.

"Some drivers," she laments, "get tired of all the intimidation and leave. They were just trying to do a job safely for the children they carry."

Will Georgia drivers gain everything from better pay to air-conditioned buses in the next legislative session?

"Rome wasn't built in a day," Travis tells doubting non-members. "Drivers may not be the top priority in the next education budget, but we may get some things immediately.

"We're building an initial foundation so that we can come back each year with our priorities—and start to make positive changes for all ESP."

And the bigger the Association membership, the faster those changes will come. ✔

To read GAE's proposed Safe School Bus Act, go to www.gae.org/teamesp. To contact Jill Travis, send an E-mail to jilljtravis@aol.com.

YOUR DUES DID IT

South African Educators Spread Wings

NEA continues tradition of aiding new teachers' union.

It's tempting to say that the South African Democratic Teachers Union has accomplished as much in its 11 years of existence as NEA has in 144 years. Today the 215,000-member SADTU, which represents two-thirds of South Africa's public school teachers, is a tough negotiator at the public sector bargaining table and the key player in national education debates.

But SADTU's biggest accomplishment is its role, as part of a political/labor coalition, in peacefully dismantling apartheid, a legislated system of racial segregation that brutalized South African society from 1948 to 1991.

Apartheid was bolstered by the country's public schools, which were funded unequally and administered through 13 separate national education departments, divided along lines of race or ethnicity.

Black students, funded at one-eighth the level of white children, were instructed with a curriculum that included little math and science and focused on rote learning. The goal: create a passive class of manual laborers.

Teachers, too, were trapped in apartheid's web. "Non-European" educators received one year less of training than their white counterparts, and the entire teaching force was splintered among dozens of small, weak unions.

But what a difference a decade makes.

In 1990, South African teachers merged many of their unions into SADTU, the "first unitary, non-racial, non-sexist national union" for educators.

SADTU went on to help elect a democratic, multiracial government in 1994, which quickly created one single national education department and school system.

What does this little history lesson have to do with you?

"NEA was always there to support us, even in the darkest days of apartheid," stresses David Segweng Moreothata, a SADTU negotiator.

Before 1991, NEA frequently participated in protests at the South African embassy in Washington, D.C., testified in Congress for sanctions against the apartheid regime, and played a leadership role in an international anti-racism coalition.

NEA also paid for the legal defense of South African teacher leaders and even helped fund the founding meeting of SADTU.

Today, SADTU stands on its own feet and pays its own bills. But it faces challenges that would daunt our 144-year-old Association.

SADTU is working to reverse the legacy of apartheid. It's pushing for goals like spending equity, better professional development (one-third of South African teachers are still underqualified), and a curriculum that balances knowledge and skills with values like tolerance, democracy, and human rights.

This young union knows it'll age quickly if it tries to reinvent the wheel.

That's why a four-member SADTU delegation, headed by Moreothata, recently conducted "best practice" research in the United State on issues ranging from professional development to gender equity.

These visitors found a willing guide in a longtime friend—NEA.

The South African delegation met with NEA program staff, visited public schools, and attended NEA's Priority Schools Initiative conference in Atlanta.

Shermain Mannah, a SADTU education expert, says she's been intrigued by American professional development schools linked to higher ed institutions and NEA's work on "public conversations" designed to build community support for public schools.

"We're finding from school visits and talks with professional development staff," Mannah concludes, "that our two countries have a lot of similarities regarding issues of language, equity, and professional development. There's a lot we can learn from here."

Delegation leader Moreothata has been inspired by NEA conference discussions on ways to teach students in struggling schools. The message he'll take home: "You must put your personal interests aside and extend more to the child before you 'label' him—and make the curriculum more interesting and fun."

"I wish the director of our national department of education would come to NEA!" laughs Mannah.

Our door is always open. ✔

Bill Fischer

South African visitors Nomzi Masawa, Shermain Mannah, David Segweng Moreothata, and Jon Peter Lewis took new ideas home.

RIGHTS WATCH

The Courts Weigh In...

...On moment of silence, seat assignments, and ESP rights.

In a decision with national implications, a divided federal appeals court has upheld a Virginia law requiring every public school in the state to establish a daily "moment of silence" to enable students to "mediate, pray, or engage in any other silent activity."

The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals last July rejected arguments by a coalition of students and parents in *Brown v. Gilmore* that the practice violates the First Amendment's requirement of church/state separation.

The minute of silence does not "promote" prayer or any other religious activity, the two-judge majority argued. Rather, it provides each student a daily opportunity "to think, to meditate, to quiet emotions, to clear the mind, to focus on the day, to relax, to doze, or to pray."

As such, the pause at the beginning of the school day is an effective "classroom management tool" and makes for a "better school day," the majority concluded.

Warning that the "Virginia statute is, like the Trojan Horse, a hollow guise," dissenting Judge Robert B. King complained that the law is nothing more that a "thinly veiled attempt to reintroduce state-sanctioned prayer into [the public] schools."

Asserting that "the statute's true aim" is "to encourage students to pray," the judge concluded that the law is unconstitutional under the 1985 Supreme Court decision Wallace v. Jaffre, which struck down an Alabama "moment of silence" statute.

In October, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal of the Fourth Circuit's ruling.

■ ■ ■

Can a school district secretly videotape its employees in order to catch them loafing on the job? According to an Ohio appellate court, the answer is "yes."

In the fall of 1998, officials of the Kings Local School District in Ohio installed a hidden video camera in the staff break room of Kings High School to find out if custodians who worked the graveyard shift were taking excessive breaks.

Two of the custodians who were secretly taped later sued claiming that the practice violated their Fourth Amendment right to be free from unlawful searches and seizures.

Rejecting that claim, the Ohio Court of Appeals for the Twelfth District, ruled in July that, because the break room was open for use by all school employees, the custodians had no "expectation of privacy" in that space.

The court went on to say that, even if the custodians did have an expectation of privacy in the break room, the secret taping was still permissible because the employer had a legitimate interest in determining whether the custodians were taking excessive, unauthorized work breaks.

In reaching its decision, the court relied on an earlier federal court ruling from Kansas that community college officials did not violate the Fourth Amendment by secretly videotaping the locker room of college security officers during an investigation of alleged thefts.

■ ■ ■

A federal appeals court in Chicago has ruled that a Wisconsin third grade teacher can be sued for making student seating assignments based on race.

The parents of an African-American student at John Muir Elementary School in Madison, Wisconsin, sued their third-grader's teacher, Nancy Zabel, after learning that she utilized a racially-based seating plan that paired up African-American students.

Zabel attempted to justify the practice by claiming that, "in my education training sometimes we were told that African-American students need a buddy, and sometimes it works well if they have someone else working with them because they view things in a global manner."

Last August, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals held in *Billings* v. *Madison Metropolitan School District* that this practice violates the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution and that Zabel—but not the school district—can be held personally liable for money damages.

■ ■ ■

Although education support professionals (ESP) are sometimes treated like second-class citizens, a federal appeals court recently reaffirmed that ESP are entitled to the full protection of the U. S. Constitution, and can't be fired because they support the "wrong" candidate in a school board election.

Harold Taylor had a spotless employment record as a custodian in the Bell County (Kentucky) School District. His principal called him "the best custodian" he had ever had.

He was also politically active. Unfortunately for him, Taylor campaigned for the losing candidate in a school board election, a candidate whose chief campaign promise was to get rid of the superintendent, Yvonne Gilliam.

Payback time. Claiming a "financial crisis," Gilliam laid off Taylor a few months after the election and replaced him with one of her own campaign workers. As an ESP, Taylor didn't have "tenure" or any other job protection.

Fortunately for Taylor, however, he belonged to the Kentucky Educational Support Personnel Association, which, along with NEA, funded a federal lawsuit on his behalf.

The trial court dismissed the case before trial. But in October the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed.

"The First Amendment of the United States Constitution," the court declared, "prohibits the discharge of a public employee for his political beliefs or affiliations."

Emphasizing Taylor's "exemplary" work record, the court concluded that there was more than enough evidence to support Taylor's claim that Gilliam retaliated against him for working in the campaign of her political enemy. The case, *Taylor v. Bell County Board of Education*, has been sent back to the lower court for trial. ✔

—Michael D. Simpson
NEA Office of General Counsel

Supreme Court To Hear Voucher Case

The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to decide whether public funds can be used to pay for private religious schooling.

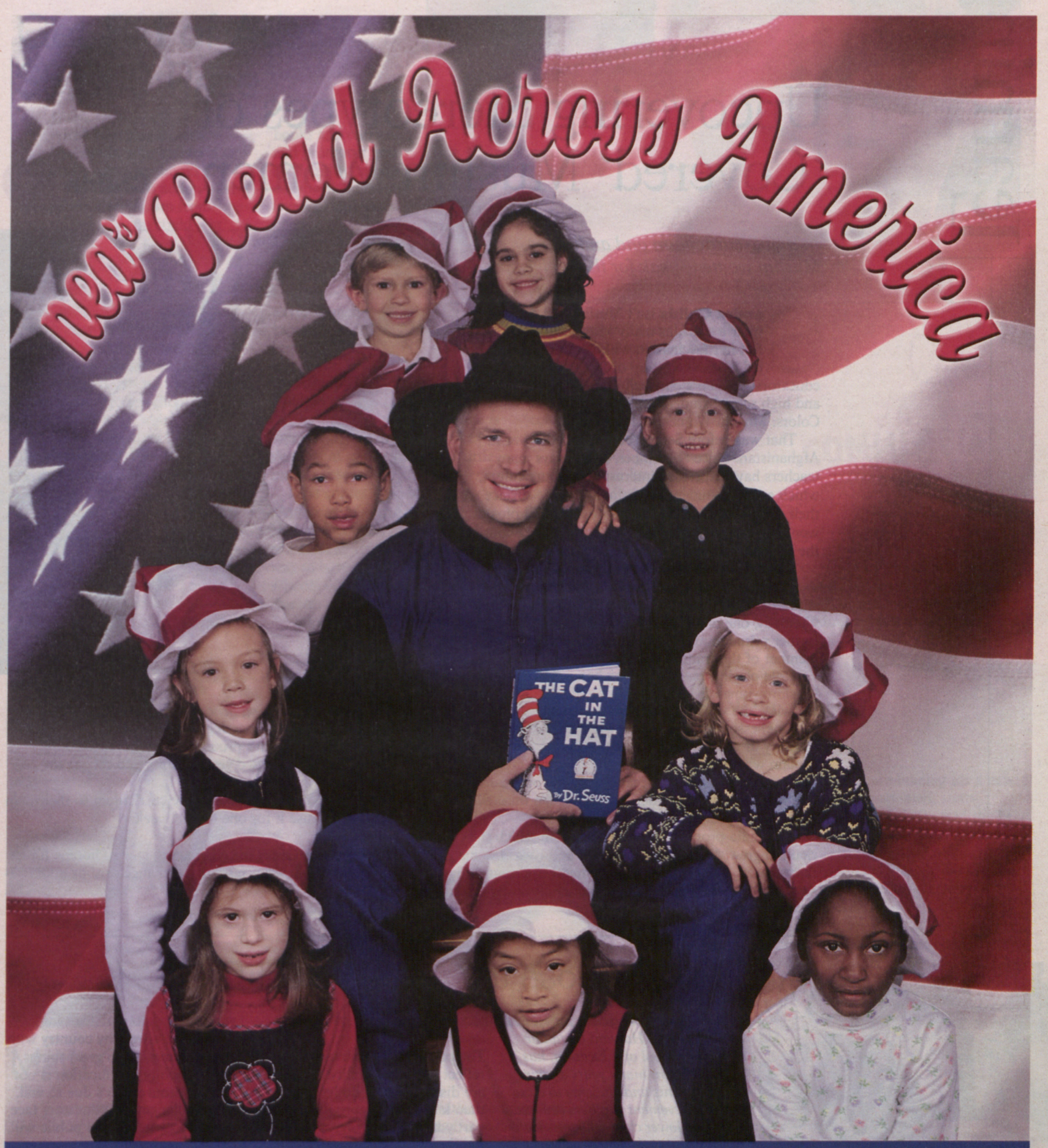
The case involves the six-year-old Cleveland school voucher program, which provides low-income families with tuition vouchers worth up to $2,250. For the 1999-2000 school year, 3,761 Cleveland-area students received vouchers, and 96 percent of the students used the vouchers to attend pervasively religious schools.

In a lawsuit brought by NEA and several other pro-public education groups, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ruled last year that the use of taxpayer money to fund religious education breaches the wall of separation between church and state.

"This scheme," the court said, "involves the grant of state aid directly and predominantly to the coffers of private religious schools," resulting in the use of public money to subsidize religious indoctrination. As an example, the court cited one voucher school that requires its students to "pledge allegiance to the Christian flag and to the Savior for whose Kingdom it stands...."

Although the High Court struck down a similar voucher program in 1973, the emergence of a conservative majority on the Court has voucher proponents predicting success this time around.

NEA General Counsel Robert Chanin will present oral argument to the Court in February or March, and a decision is expected early next summer. ***—M.D.S.***



READ ACROSS AMERICA
AN NEA PROJECT

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Uncovering Stereotypes of 'Covered' Muslim Women

Childs

In a new curriculum and audiotape, Muslim women speak for themselves.

John Gress

Sandra Childs isn't Muslim and doesn't wear a scarf, as many Muslim women do. But her fascination with Muslim culture led her and a group of Portland, Oregon, educators to write a curriculum last year for middle and high school students called "Scarves of Many Colors: Muslim Women and the Veil."

That was before September 11 and the war in Afghanistan. Since September, Childs says many teachers have expressed interest in the curriculum, which engages students by bringing to the surface their preconceptions. Students are shown photos of women wearing scarves, and asked to write about the women's thoughts, families, and daily routines.

"Students write stories of oppressed women," says Childs, an NEA member who teaches social studies at Franklin High School in Portland. "Actually, one of the women in the photos is the former prime minister of Pakistan. Another is a member of the Iranian parliament."

Role-playing exercises bring home the idea that Muslim women live in many different situations and view the world in different ways.

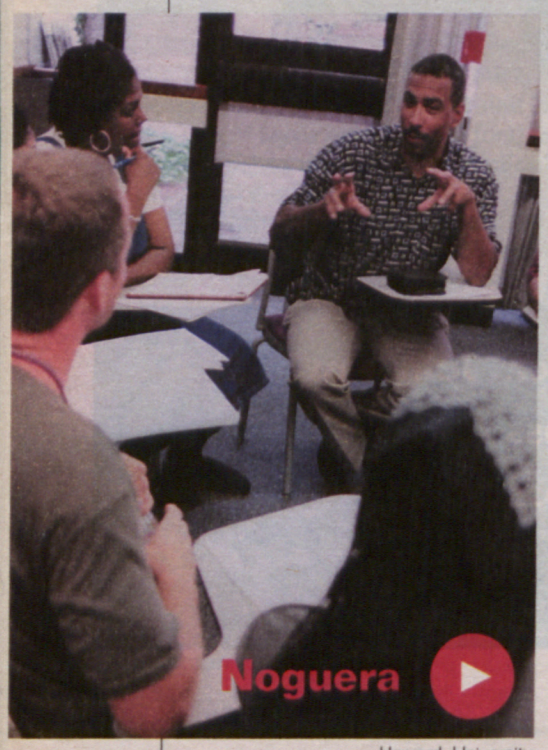
One lesson uses an award-winning public radio documentary in which American and Middle Eastern women explain why they cover their hair. "In some cultures, women cover their hair because they are oppressed. But in others, it is an act of defiance, or a sign that tells the public to respect them," says Childs.

The radio program was the seed from which the curriculum grew. "I heard the program and I was fascinated that wearing a veil could mean so many different things," says **Bill Bigelow**, a Portland teacher currently on leave to work for *Rethinking Schools* magazine.

Bigelow set up a meeting for Childs and other teachers with the program's producer, Joan Bohorfoush. The teachers then spent two years writing and testing the curriculum.

Childs says teachers adapt the curriculum to their own needs. Most use it for one to two weeks.

For More: Order the curriculum and audiotape for $15 plus s&h at www.teachingforchange.org/ or 800/763-9131.



Harvard University

How To Close the Achievement Gap

Pedro Noguera, *professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has spent many years working with parents and students to close the achievement gap between middle and lower class students. He was a featured speaker at NEA's Priority Schools Initiative conference in October.*

You worked in a Berkeley, California high school. What was the challenge?
These kids faced tough issues. They lived in communities that had a lot of crime and drugs. There was a kind of despondency, but these kids still had dreams. We had kids who wanted to go to college but didn't know how to get there. We had to help them figure that out.

Why is there an achievement gap?
The patterns of achievement reflect social inequality. Kids who are disadvantaged do less well than kids who are privileged. It's partly because they have less educated parents, but then we compound the problem: To those who have the least, we give the least in education resources.

What's the way forward?
Right now, policy makers rarely consult educators about what's needed. They're much more likely to consult business leaders.

The debate is dominated by noneducators, who know very little about what it takes to promote learning. They've fixated on testing, but assessment only tells you what kids know. It doesn't tell you how to promote learning.

We are a wealthy country with the resources to do great things. Our difficulty in education is not due to resources. It's due to will. The challenge that educators face is how to generate the public will.

What can educators do?
As individuals, it's very, very hard. But educators can organize with each other and with parents. Parents want the same things educators want. We've got to be much more creative about building alliances with parents.

For More: Visit www.inmotionmagazine.com/noguera.html. For more on NEA's Priority Schools Initiative, visit www.nea.org. Search for Priority Schools.

Get Rid of Ads: $5,000 Prize

John Gress

Tired of seeing advertisements in your cafeteria or in student textbooks? Implement an action plan to expel commercialism from your school and you could win $5,000.

That's the idea behind the first annual "National Ad Slam Contest," sponsored by Commercial Alert, a nonprofit organization established three years ago by Ralph Nader to protect children and communities from commercialism.

"Children go to school to learn how to read, write, and think," says Executive Director **Gary Ruskin**. "They don't go to school to learn how to shop. Yet hundreds of corporations market their products aggressively to our children every day on school grounds."

Ruskin believes advertising by Pepsi, Coke, Doritos, and other corporations wastes valuable instructional time, corrupts textbooks and curricula, and promotes junk food and soda pop despite skyrocketing levels of childhood obesity.

Commercial Alert is also against Channel One, which broadcasts news and advertisements to captive audiences of about 8 million children in 12,000 schools each day.

"Compelling impressionable children to view commercials during their limited school time is repugnant," he says. "Corporations want to use schools as little market-research factories."

The contest—endorsed by *Mothering Magazine* and the National Council of the Churches of Christ among others—is "one way to have fun as we rid our schools of marketers," says Ruskin.

Educators, parents, and students have until May 15 to tell Commercial Alert what they are doing to get the advertisers out. This can include activities such as changing school policies about commercialism or holding creative events and rallies.

The $5,000 grand prize will be awarded in June, along with other prizes for creativity, media coverage, and teamwork.

"Our schools should be sacred ground because children have enough exposure to advertisers," Ruskin adds. "If enough of us participate, maybe we can make that happen."

COMMERCIAL ALERT

For More: Go to www.commercialalert.org/adslam/index.html for more on the contest, including suggested activities.

Steve Wilson

Math Gigs Hit Center Stage

Junior high teacher **Tammy King** was enjoying a student concert one evening when she found herself wishing math students could publicly demonstrate how much they'd learned, just like the music students.

"Then I thought, why not? Why can't we put math concepts on stage?"

So King, who has taught at Mountain Ridge Junior High in Highland, Utah, for six years, created *Mathtasia*, in which students dramatize, sing, and dance math concepts. The first show was so successful that schools throughout the area are staging their own. Now, it's an annual event.

King is thrilled with how much fun her students have with math. "I can't believe how much more they learn when they have to come up with a song or skit," she says. *Mathtasia* gigs have included demonstrating right, obtuse, and acute angles with hand gestures accompanied by the music of "YMCA"; and skateboarding up and down positive and negative slopes. In the works: a Wizard of Oz parody that features the X-kins of Functionland.

Students who normally wouldn't be motivated by math are tuning in, says King. "When they see a good idea for the show, they grab it. My typical, 'I'm too tough for school' kid will say, 'We're going to do a rap' to this or that math concept."

For More: Write to Tammy King at Mountain Ridge Junior High, 5525 West 10400 North, Highland, Utah 84003.

Making Tests More Useful

Public school educators are bracing for a new onslaught of federally mandated, state-administered standardized tests—and the heat is on classroom teachers to deliver student performance on those tests, big time. Now, a commission of leading testing experts is putting the heat on the states to make the tests useful to teachers in improving student achievement.

The panel of experts, convened by NEA and four other national education organizations, is headed by Dr. James W. Popham, emeritus professor at UCLA. The commission has produced a report titled *Building Tests to Support Instruction and Accountability*, containing a set of nine criteria by which states can be held accountable.

In essence, the report says: Let's not leave teachers in the dark about the content their students are being asked to master.

Let's not leave them wondering exactly how each student performed on standardized tests.

And instead of playing blame games with test results, let's provide educators with the professional development they need to use those results on the frontlines, in the classroom.

Having issued its criteria for state accountability, the commission does not intend to go away. Next year, it plans a second report that will assess the states on these criteria.

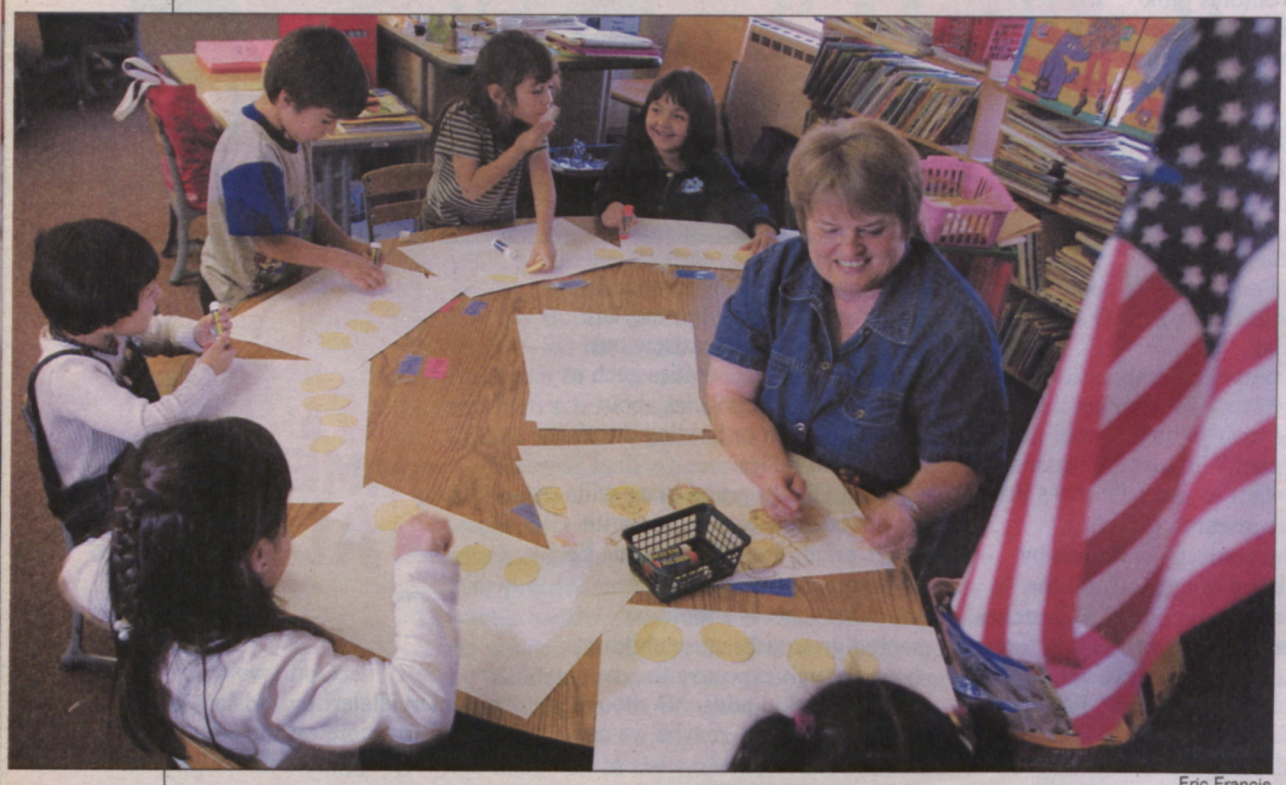
Marcie Dianda, NEA senior policy analyst and point person for the commission, says the group "hopes to see a new generation of state tests, tests that are useful to teachers."

For More: Read the report and its nine criteria for judging the states on the NEA Web site at www.nea.org/issues/high-stakes/buildingtests.html.

Learning

'I Can Be Anything'

Smaller classes and culturally relevant curricula raise student achievement in Omaha.



Eric Francis

Phyllis Christiansen's kindergarteners learn in a dual-language program that aims to make them bilingual and biliterate by sixth grade.

Last school year, Ranisha and Denzell began second grade with reading skills in only the first or second percentile for their education level. By the end of the school year, both students' reading skills had rocketed above the 50th percentile.

"Ranisha could always be found doing her reading faithfully, to the delight of her mother, and Denzell was the kid whose hand always shot up when I asked a question in class," says Tamara Bailey, a second grade teacher at Druid Hill Academy in Omaha, Nebraska.

Druid Hill is one of 22 Academy Schools established by the Omaha Public Schools two years ago to improve student achievement in low-income neighborhoods. In communities where 75 percent or more of the students qualify for free or reduced-cost school lunches, OPS is infusing substantial new funding to hire more staff and dramatically reduce class size.

"The Academy system allows me to touch each kid," says Bailey, whose class size is 14. "When the classes had 25, some kids would hide from being called on. Now, I have kids complaining if they're not called on."

Embracing the cultures of Omaha neighborhoods is another important component of Academy Schools.

Druid Hill is one of three Afrocentric schools in the program. To motivate students while celebrating African-American culture, the school holds a weekly assembly called a *harambee*, the Swahili word for "let's pull together." The kids chant affirmations such as "I can be anything. I can do anything."

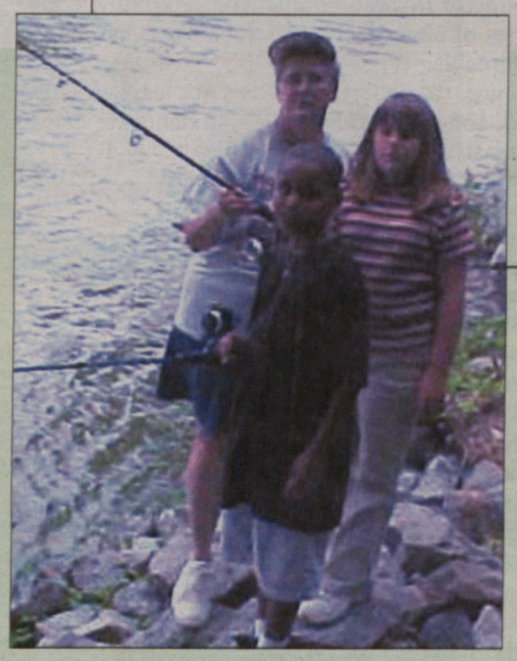
Phyllis Christiansen teaches kindergarten at Marrs Academy in a largely Hispanic section of south Omaha. There, the cultural element of the curriculum has been taken even further.

"Under the Academy system, we've become the first public school in the state to develop a dual-language program. It's not ESL. It's English and Spanish, and our goal is to start kids on a path in kindergarten that will lead them to be bilingual and biliterate by the end of sixth grade."

Christiansen teaches her class in English. Nearby, her colleague Irma Franco is teaching the same lessons to her own class in Spanish. But for a portion of the day, the kids switch classrooms—and languages.

"We don't teach something in English and then teach it again in Spanish," says Christiansen. "There is no repetition. Instead, there is continuity. When the kids switch classrooms, the previous lesson is so fresh in their minds that they naturally take in the new lesson in a different language."

Like Bailey, Christiansen says class size is critical. "I have 17 in my class," she says. "For the first time, I feel I'm able to address individual needs, and I



How I Did It

Nancye Garland
Lincoln Elementary School
Resource Instructor
Kingsport, Tennessee

A special education teacher discovers a way to hook both students and parents.

I want to share one of the most successful ideas I've had for working with special needs kids. For the last two years, instead of the usual pizza party or trip to the park at the end of the year, I took the class and their parents fishing. My colleagues thought I'd gone off the deep end.

The students were so excited they planned and planned. I didn't know whether to be excited or pray for rain.

Some kids came to the lake with tubs of worms, as if we were going to fish all evening and night. There were parents who'd never come to school who talked to me about their children. Their excitement was palpable. Parents and students and teacher fished side-by-side. This was the first time I'd seen my students outside class. I stayed until after dark with a hyperactive fourth-grader who could barely leave his line in the water.

I felt like I'd solved the world's problems as I drove home. Fishing has become the common ground for my students, a topic for conversation and written language lessons, and a successful experience that's helped the class bond.

Although I have years of

have time to coordinate my work with parents. Instead of meeting all the parents at quarterly meeting, I phone two parents a night and have them all briefed on their kids progress in a little more than a week. Then I start over."

Bailey, too, says her relationship with parents has improved. "They're excited about their kids' progress. They're coming to see me more. The last time I held a parent/teacher conference, I had 14 parents show up for 14 kids. I'd never had 100 percent before."

"The Academy system allows me to touch each kid."

—Second grade teacher Tamara Bailey

Carolyn Grice, who coordinates community outreach for OPS, says the successes at Druid Hill and Marrs are not isolated. Test scores are up significantly at all 22 Academy Schools.

"The parents have a new outlook," says Bailey. "When we started the Academy approach, I saw the kids begin to believe they could grow up to accomplish anything. Now the parents believe it. They're saying to me: 'My son or daughter can be a success.'"

"As an African-American," says Bailey, "I feel that's the greatest contribution I've made to my brothers and sisters." ✔

—Matt Simon

For more: E-mail Caroline Grice at gricec@ops.org. Also, for information about NEA's Priority Schools Initiative, visit the NEA Web site at www.nea.org.

teaching experience and several degrees, I've learned so much about children and teaching from the two fishing trips. In fact, the students and I have all learned:

• You don't have to be the best to enjoy the task.

• Continue to learn and develop new skills.

• Enjoy what you're doing.

• There's more to life than school.

• The simplest things bring the greatest pleasure.

• Don't be afraid to try.

• Motivation and determination are the keys.

My advice to peers: "When all else fails, take them fishing."

[DILEMMA]

How do you get your students back to work after a holiday?

Try a class survey. In January, I do a survey of children's New Year's resolutions. After Halloween, you can survey the kinds of candy they received, pick the six most common kinds, and make a graph. Use the Internet to find the candy manufacturers. Graph their number of employees and company worth. For Thanksgiving, ask who went out of town, who stayed home, who visited family in town, and what they had for dinner. (Know your class to be sure of poverty issues, so as not to embarrass some.) This lets them talk about the holiday but still get back to work.

Deborah Norris
Elementary special education teacher
Richmond, Virginia

■ I always tried to find a light way to pick up where we left off—a "test" asking questions about what they did, where they went, what they saw and heard. Before and after some holidays, I would have them look up the history and write a two-page paper on what they learned. At Christmas, I would have them learn about similar celebrations in different cultures. Then I would try to segue into what we were studying.

Pat McNeely
Retired middle school history teacher
Dallas, Texas

■ After a holiday, I try to make my classes a little bit competitive! I put them randomly in teams for short competitive games. I may give them a list of latitude and longitude coordinates and ask them to locate the country. Sometimes, I have them assign tasks to each team member. Other times, I ask them to solve the problem collectively. I keep the time periods short, five minutes or less. A kitchen timer is helpful. I give "Smarties" roll candy or fruit snacks to winners.

Linda Norman
Sixth grade teacher
Ayer, Massachusetts

Ted Pitts

■ The two worst times of year are after the winter holiday break and after spring break.

After January 2, guest speakers can get students back in the groove. My Technology Preparatory students hear speakers from business on job expectations, the application process, and interview skills. Colleges offer classroom presentations on many subjects, such as scholarships.

The biggest challenge is between spring break and summer. Kids just give up at that point. My technology preparatory students have a job-shadowing day the week they return from spring break. For my college preparatory students, this is a good time for a college presentation on "senioritis."

Rita Jo Swingle
English teacher
Athens, Pennsylvania

■ After a holiday, I plan to have a day of hands-on science, history, and language arts activity that gets them out of their seats but also reviews what we were studying before the vacation.

Lauren Tanner
Elementary school intern facilitator
Payson, Utah

■ This is a "building block" opportunity. A close, personal relationship is invaluable in teaching teenagers. They often have no adult who regularly takes the time to talk.

After a vacation, I talk with them about their time off: the high points, the low points. I share my holiday experience. I commiserate with them about having to go back to work. After 10 or 15 minutes of "together" time I remind them of their goals. By now they are ready to work.

Bonnie Hutchens
High school Social studies teacher
Westminster, Colorado

■ I have a group sharing time, prompted with a question.

First time around: What was the best thing about your vacation?

Second time around: What is the best thing about being back at school. This official sharing time helps get the chattiness out of their systems. Then it's back to business!

Jenny Cooper
Fourth grade teacher
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Got an Answer?

How do you deal with chronic absenteeism?

E-mail your answer to dilemma2@list.nea.org. Or send by regular mail, or fax to 202/822-7206. Please include your name, city, state, and job title. Published respondents will receive an *NEA Today* mug!

'Pee-Wee IB'

The International Baccalaureate's new elementary school program earns high marks in South Carolina.

Some jokingly call it "Pee-Wee IB," but there's nothing pint-sized about the impact of the International Baccalaureate Organization's Primary Years Programme (PYP) on three elementary schools in Beaufort County, South Carolina. Initiated in 1997, the latest addition to the IB curricula has generated a new passion for teaching and learning here. The three are among only 13 U.S. schools currently authorized to offer the PYP.

"Students are always asking questions," says Bliss West, reading teacher at Port Royal Elementary School. "They're on a quest to find out more and more and more, taking more risks than when they were confined to a more traditional school and methods of instruction. They are not afraid to learn."

PYP uses an inquiry-based approach with six themes:

- Who we are
- Where we are in place and time
- How we express ourselves
- How the world works
- How we organize ourselves, and
- Sharing the planet.

This approach to everything from language arts to science and physical education has changed West's teaching style. "My background as a Chapter I teacher had given me a very narrow focus, " says this 23-year teaching veteran. "Now I think more globally."

Classrooms are more hands-on, she says, and her school, with its host of networked computers, is more student-centered. "It's amazing to watch the research students do and the discussion topics they generate," says West. She sees the results across all levels of achievement. "PYP has taken the threat out of education. During my career, I've seen so many students afraid to talk, afraid their questions might seem silly. Now they speak up, take risks, ask questions. It's expected."

Claudia Scott, who has taught at the district's Broad River Elementary for 31 years, agrees. "Before PYP the emphasis was on what a child could or couldn't do, based on expectations we set. Now they're more in control of their learning and they do a better job. We give them the support they need."

This fall, her 16 first and second graders researched the question: What's the name of the group in control of Afghanistan? True to the PYP approach, Scott wasn't only interested in students getting the right answer. The process was at least as important. First, the youngsters had to investigate what resources to use—an encyclopedia, a newspaper, the Internet?

Challenges like this, ones that develop real-world skills, are commonplace in the PYP. Children also spend time doing science experiments and art projects, and writing poems, plays, and stories. All children start Spanish in kindergarten, and some teachers are following suit. "There's a lot more learning going on," says Scott. She has also seen behavior improve. "Students end up asking themselves how they can do things better," she notes.

Idea Exchange

Rule Reminders

When my students "forget" to follow rules, I give them a written assignment that is guaranteed to make them think twice next time.

They have to write reasons why they should and/or shouldn't follow the rule they broke.

The number of reasons they have to write depends on the grade level of the student.

Usually, students find that the first few reasons are easy to think of, but it gets harder and harder to think of more reasons.

Sometimes, they have to be very creative to complete the assignment.

Jacqueline Dixon
Newark, New Jersey

Counting Down A Freeze

One way I get my second grade class to switch gears is to count down a freeze. By the time I get to zero, they must be sitting up straight, feet under the desk and hands folded in front of them. I usually whisper, "freeze in 5-4-3-2-1-0." Those in a great freeze receive verbal praise. The table with the best freezes may receive group points. What's great is counting down the freeze in Spanish, or saying 32 degrees F or 0 degrees C when I get to zero. It's teaching across the curriculum in those in-between times. Every second counts!

Abigail Greenberg
Charlotte, North Carolina

Newspaper Resources

As an NEA life-time retired member who is now in a second career, I'd like to point out a valuable and cheap resource for teachers: newspapers.

Most newspapers have some sort of Newspapers in Education program.

Teachers can request newspapers for their classes. More than likely, the papers will be free or available at a very reduced price.

Curriculum support, activities, and lesson plans are usually provided.

Paul Crowner
Manager
Newspapers In Education
The Chronicle
Centralia, Washington

Works 4 Me
nea's e-mail classroom tip of the week!

Have a great idea? You can pass along your tip to *NEA Today*'s 2.6 million readers in one of five ways:

- By mail: NEA Today, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- By phone: 202/822-7201
- By fax: 202/822-7206
- By E-mail: Ideas@neatoday.nea.org
- Through the Web: www.nea.org/neatoday

Photos by Wade Spees

Reading teacher Bliss West works with fourth and fifth graders in the International Baccalaureate program at Port Royal Elementary School.

Assessment runs the gamut—from anecdotal records to portfolios, rubrics, and traditional tests. There's lots of self-assessment with students documenting everything they do. After finishing a unit, youngsters write reflections in notebooks. Instead of letter grades, written comments fill report cards.

PYP was originally discovered by Beaufort administrators looking for a gifted program, but it is working for children of all ability levels, and in schools serving low-income as well as affluent children.

Beaufort's three high schools offer the IB Diploma Programme, although few students participate. That may change as the PYP children reach their teens. Meanwhile, Beaufort's middle schools and two more elementaries have applied for the IBO's seal of approval.

In South Carolina, students from third grade on take state tests. It's too soon to tell whether PYP will boost scores, and other school initiatives will make it hard to isolate the PYP effect. But the mention of scores makes PYP proponents cringe because many qualities their schools foster—thinking, self-confidence, curiosity, and cross-cultural understanding—can't be quantified.

West says state standards do act as a guide for teachers, but they don't teach to the test. The state's open-ended questions mesh well with the PYP's heavy writing emphasis, she adds.

Most important, says West: "Our children love coming to school!" ✔

—Mary Anne Hess

For more: Visit www.ibo.org.

[DILEMMA]

How do you improve the return rate of papers sent home?

Ted Pitts

I use the oldest trick in the book: *positive reinforcement.* They get a prize if the paper comes back the very next day. The key is knowing what your students want! I teach middle school and I use a toy or piece of candy. Younger students bring forms back for a sticker. Some will do it for an extra credit point. No matter the age, this is a sure-fire method! The few who forget the first time won't forget again when they see all the prizes distributed!

Sherri Barrett
Sixth grade science teacher
South Hampton, Pennsylvania

■ I collect important papers in a folder for each student. On Fridays, they put the papers into manila envelopes to take home. That way, parents can depend on getting everything at one time—no straggling papers stuffed in backpacks. At first, to get the class into the habit of returning the envelopes, I offer incentives. By October, they have it down.

There is a place on the envelopes for parents to sign, a place to check off how they felt about their child's work that week, and a place to ask me to contact them.

Andrea Payne
Third grade teacher
Lewistown, Montana

■ I send home a weekly newsletter that tells class news as well as my expectations. Parents then know that I want their children to develop into responsible people, and that I want them to know how their children are doing. When I send something home that I need returned, I put my "Sign and Return to School" stamp on it. I make sure that I have a copy. If I do not get it back, I can mail it. But I seldom have to do this!

Sue Resop
Second grade teacher
Seymour, Wisconsin

■ When I want papers signed and returned by parents, I offer students chances to get a homework pass. A signed test with an *A* grade gets three tickets. A paper with a *B* gets two tickets, and a *C* receives one. The tickets are placed in a jar and a winner is drawn. This spurs interest, and I know the parents have seen the work.

Rosemary Ordile
Fourth grade teacher
Northfield, New Jersey

■ At our school, we staple papers to notices for upcoming events such as field trips and sports activities. These events require parent signatures for participation, so students take the forms home.

Timothy Warren
Middle school band director
Jacksonville, Florida

■ At the beginning of the year, I teach my students how to get their parents to complete paperwork that we need returned. First, I demonstrate the elbow hold. I hold a student's elbow while I explain what I need (a signature). I don't let go until I get the signature. If the paperwork is a little longer, there's the modified elbow hold, which consists of gathering the needed supplies before latching on and then offering to do chores while the paperwork is completed. If an interruption causes progress to stall, it may be necessary to reinstate the original elbow hold. I explain to my students that this may be a start and stop process until they get their parents trained.

Karen Nielsen
Elementary teacher
Beaverton, Oregon

Got an Answer?

How do you get your early morning classes awake and working?

E-mail your answer to dilemma2@list.nea.org. Or send by regular mail, or fax to 202/822-7206. Include your name, city, state, and job title. Published respondents will receive an *NEA Today* mug!

"Real Teachers. . . believe that unspeakable evil will befall you if anyone says, 'Boy your kids are mellow today.'"

— Jennifer Watson-Bird, eighth grade English teacher, Danville, California

Reading and Leading By Example

In Walnut, California, an award-winning literacy program creates a chain of reading mentors.

Photos by Bob Riha, Jr.

Walnut High teacher Connie Spencer follows along as older students mentor younger students in reading.

If it's Wednesday, the students of NEA member Connie Spencer must be at Vejar Elementary School. Once a week, the high school students travel to their elementary school to read, play vocabulary games, and work with second, third, fourth, and fifth graders.

They're also there to offer MORE—More Opportunities for Reading Enrichment—and more chances for connecting, mentoring, and character building. During 45-minute sessions, two Walnut high students are paired with one second or third grader, and one fourth or fifth grader. The teams work closely together. The high schoolers read to and mentor the fourth and fifth graders, who in turn, mentor the younger students.

"We did this because our research told us students improved their reading and class work when they worked with mentors," explains Spencer, a Walnut language arts teacher. "We decided to create a chain of mentors, each link building on the next. We knew the younger students would thrive with help from older elementary students, and both groups looked up to the high schoolers."

The project started small three years ago when Spencer began working with Vejar's Dr. Diana Ketterman-Brockett, director of Character Champions, a project linking social and literacy skill development. But with a first-place award and grant from the Youth Leaders for Literacy, a joint initiative between the NEA's Read Across America and Youth Service America, the project has taken off.

"We currently have 80 students working together and others eager to get involved," says Spencer. "We never dreamed this would be so successful."

Vejar Elementary teacher and MORE co-coordinator Jim Brandenburgh agrees. "Once we worked out the logistics, everything moved smoothly. We're beginning to see the real benefits of this project. Students who had struggled with their reading were finding help from their peers. They also began to see learning as great fun.

"At the same time, the high school students have begun to take notice," says Spencer. "It isn't every day that you see the impact of your care and attention. "

"These students are beginning to see what mentoring, particularly literacy mentoring is all about," Spencer adds. "You not only get the intrinsic rewards of getting involved in your community, but you also realize the importance reading plays in your life and the lives of others."

Vejar student Allison Hernandez agrees. She used her favorite book, *Charlotte's Web*, as a source of inspiration for her interest in literacy service. "It's about helping others," says Hernandez. "that's what all of us are trying to do."

"Another reason why the MORE project is so important is that it builds up a connection between students of all ages, particularly the young," adds Spencer. "We hope that by offering these kinds of activities and support systems, the school world will have fewer incidents like the one at Columbine High School. Reading is the gateway for a great many things, and we already know of its rich rewards." ✔

—Anita Merina

For more information on the MORE project, E-mail Connie Spencer at conspencer@aol.com.

Resolve to Read!

It's a brand new year and what better way to celebrate than getting involved in NEA's Read Across America campaign year-round? To get you started and keep you going, NEA's Read Across America Web site features a Literacy Calendar full of reading celebrations and suggested activities. You'll also find materials from the RAA Resource kit, booklists, and pledges from schools and communities around the country. The site will also feature materials in Spanish. Share your plans for the March 1 celebration of Dr. Seuss' birthday. Go to www.nea.org/readacross.

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HOW TO... Create a Reader Leader

Youth Service America President Steve Culbertson has his own family tie to literacy. His grandfather was college roommates with Dr. Seuss, Theodore Geisel. These days, Culbertson coordinates National Youth Service Day, the largest service event in the world, involving 3 million young people. Under Culbertson's leadership, YSA joined NEA in creating the Youth Leaders for Literacy initiative, offering grants for reading-related activities. Here, he offers project suggestions and grant information.

- **Mentor young readers. Set up a reading project like the Walnut project, offering activities, reading time, and events that link students young and old.**
- **Help your students conduct reading challenges. The challenges can be within a school or between schools.**
- **Have students coordinate bookfairs featuring local authors or their own work. Encourage them to take the lead in organizing readings and poetry slams.**
- **Look for additional literacy activities, such as reading books onto tape for the visually impaired.**
- **Don't forget to enter the Youth Leaders for Literacy contest. Twenty-five projects will receive a $200 award each and the top five will receive $200 and a book collection. Begin your literacy project March 1, 2002, and celebrate it on Youth Service Day April 26-28. To apply, go to www.nea.org/readacross. For more on YSA, go to www.ysa.org.**

Do Vouchers Help Kids Learn?

Despite the hype, impartial studies show there's no evidence they do.

This year, the nine Supreme Court justices are scheduled to decide whether vouchers—public money going to private K-12 schools—violate the U.S. Constitution. Voucher supporters have for years been saying private schools can do a much better job than public schools. But the public has been skeptical, recently defeating voucher referenda in California and Michigan by overwhelming margins. Last August, the General Accounting Office (GAO) took a hard look at the evidence. Their conclusion: There's no valid evidence that vouchers help students learn.

Where are vouchers now in effect?

The program before the Supreme Court is in Cleveland, Ohio. As of June 2000, roughly 3,400 Cleveland students had vouchers. About 97 percent of them were going to religious schools. According to the GAO, "the maximum voucher amount ($2,250 for low-income students) established by the Ohio legislature at the beginning of the voucher program appears to have limited the program primarily to low-tuition religious schools." The use of tax money to support religious schools is one of the issues before the Supreme Court.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has a larger program with 7,600 children as of 2000. Florida has a small voucher program. Maine and Vermont have long-standing programs but only for students in rural districts where there is no age-appropriate public school, and the private schools must be secular.

What is the GAO?

The General Accounting Office is the investigative arm of Congress. It conducts a wide range of studies on public policy issues.

What did the GAO report say about vouchers and student learning?

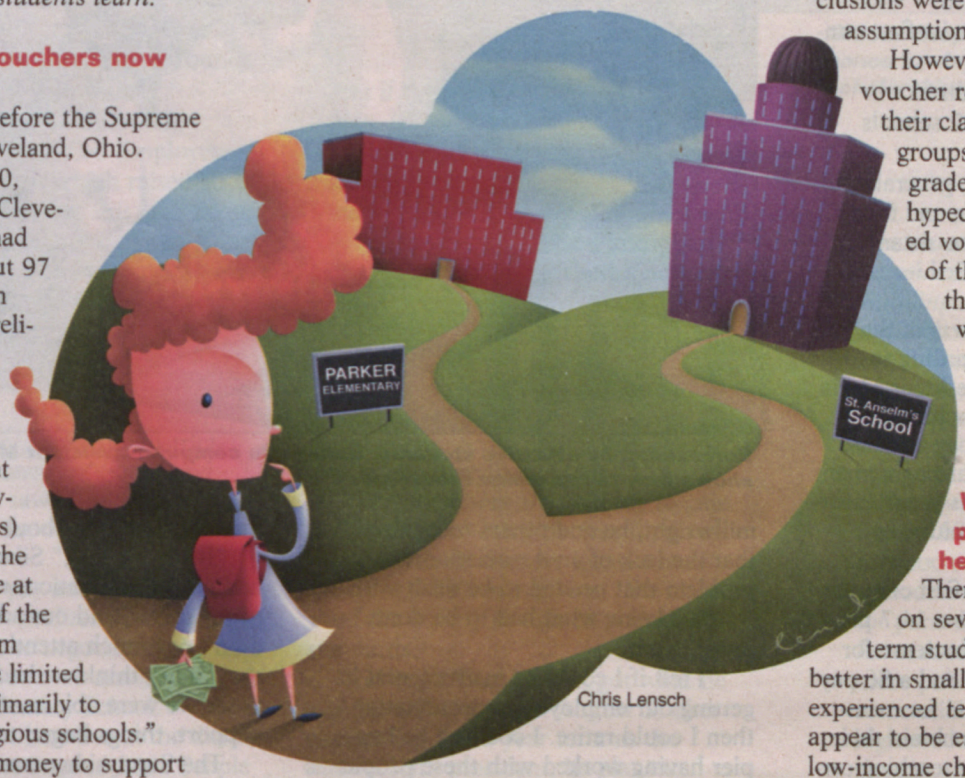
The GAO reviewed studies of test scores for students from Cleveland and Milwaukee, comparing children in voucher programs with other children who were in the public schools. GAO found no evidence that children in voucher programs do better.

The researchers based their report on studies commissioned by state education departments in Ohio and Wisconsin. The GAO referred to these studies as "contracted evaluations."

The report says: "The contracted evaluations of voucher students' academic achievement in Cleveland and Milwaukee found little or no difference in voucher and public school students' performance."

What about researchers who claim that vouchers do work?

The GAO report said their studies did not meet the standards of good social science because they did not use adequate controls. To tell whether students benefit from vouchers, researchers must compare children who use vouchers with similar children in public schools. GAO found that pro-voucher researchers failed to do this.



Chris Lensch

Why are there conflicting claims about the effects of vouchers?

It is very difficult to conduct valid, objective research on "social engineering" experiments like vouchers because people can't be treated like guinea pigs—they can't be assigned randomly to one program or another, don't necessarily stay in the program once they start, and can't be forced to cooperate with researchers even if they do stay.

In Cleveland and Milwaukee, a high percentage of families did not return survey questionnaires. Were these families similar to those that did return questionnaires? Some children went to private schools on vouchers but then left. Could some of them have left because they did badly there?

Some students were offered vouchers but turned them down and stayed in the public schools. Others left the public schools when they learned they would not get vouchers. Perhaps these were children whose parents planned to put them in private schools all along.

In addition, researchers were unable to get some of the test score data they needed.

In all these situations, researchers had to make assumptions about the missing or possibly biased data. GAO concluded that the different study conclusions were due to different sets of assumptions that researchers made.

However, even the most pro-voucher researchers have limited their claims of success to certain groups of students at certain grade levels. After a much-hyped report on privately funded vouchers in three cities, one of the chief investigators took the highly unusual step of warning publicly that the person in charge of the study was going beyond the data to put a positive spin on vouchers.

What are some proven strategies for helping students learn?

There is solid evidence based on several well-controlled, long-term studies that children learn better in small classes with well-trained, experienced teachers. Small classes appear to be especially beneficial for low-income children, the same children whom voucher proponents claim to be trying to help.

What is NEA doing about vouchers?

NEA and its state affiliates are playing a leading role in opposing vouchers. At the national, state, and local levels, NEA lobbyists and members educate policy-makers and opinion leaders about the strengths of public education. And NEA General Counsel Robert Chanin will present the argument against vouchers to the Supreme Court (see "Rights Watch" box on page 18).

Most important, NEA works to build public confidence in the public schools by improving schools for all students. ✔

—Alain Jehlen

For more: Read the General Accounting Office report at www.gao.gov/new.items/d01914.pdf. The NEA Web site has additional information and links at www.nea.org/topics/privatization/vouchers.

TEAMWORK

Arizona ESP Local's Perseverance Pays Off

First contract for Tucson classified school employees represents a major victory.

"It was the highlight of my eight years in the general maintenance department of the Sunnyside Unified School District," says Tony Silvain, a former school maintenance employee in Tucson, Arizona. Silvain retired in August, but not before he saw the Sunnyside Classified Employees Association win its first contract.

The Sunnyside school district in south Tucson consists of 22 schools and nearly 5,000 students.

SCEA represents office, general maintenance, transportation and food services personnel, teacher assistants, and custodians. SCEA ratified its contract in June.

The most important parts of the pact, according to SCEA President Maria Brown, include a $1 an hour pay increase and a board agreement to pay this year's insurance premium increase.

"This first contract represents a 14.7 percent pay increase for members and a $6 pay differential for members who obtain their substitute teaching certificate," Brown says.

Angie Ochoa is vice president of SCEA.

When Silvain joined Sunnyside after a 20-year career as a millwright, he and others recognized that the lack of an Association was a problem that needed to be dealt with.

"We knew what had to be done," says Silvain.

"I felt if I could be instrumental in getting our employees representation, then I could retire. I couldn't be happier having worked with these people and realizing our dream of getting a contract," Silvain says."

Silvain and other Sunnyside leaders like Brown and Vice President Angie Ochoa recall the countless hours spent organizing, securing support of other local labor unions, and convincing the school board and administrators that they were serious about organizing.

"It wasn't easy," Silvain recalls. "We had no representation, no voice in negotiations, and our administrators didn't pay much attention to us because they didn't think we had any support. Once we were able to show we had support, things began to change."

The Sunnyside community got behind the organizing drive, and local labor unions waged a letter-writing campaign. Ten different labor organizations, and even some school board members, wrote letters to the school board.

"We couldn't have done it by ourselves," Silvain recalls. "We have a

Photos by John Miller

Surrounded by attentive students, Sunnyside computer assistant Maria Brown shows how to tap online resources.

Going the Extra Mile

Jeanie Davee, a member of Colorado's Harrison Educational Support Personnel Association (HESPA), has reason to be proud. A driver instructor specialist for Harrison School District 2, she is the only bus driver in the country with three national certifications in her profession. Davee has been in school transportation for 25 years. She began her career as a school bus driver and became a driver trainer in 1989.

Davee received her first national certification in 1995 as a driver instructor, the second in 1996 for transportation specialist. Recently, she successfully completed the exam for her third national certification with the National Association of Pupil Transportation (NAPT) as supervisor of transportation.

Members of the Lansing (Michigan) Educational Assistants Association have launched their second annual campaign to provide needy students with cold weather clothing. LEA members are asking students in Lansing schools to collect mittens, gloves, socks, hats, and scarves so that no student has to face the winter without proper clothing.

The Warm Hand/Warm Feet Campaign is the brain child of LEA Vice President **Annette Marrison**.

"Too many times we've seen our students on the playground without the proper warm clothing during winter," Marrison says. "They can get sick, and that slows their learning progress."

Last year, LEA members collected enough items for all the students who needed them for all of the district's schools for most of the winter. This year's goal: enough clothing so that all students will

TEAM PLAYER

Making a Difference in His Community

Name: **Stephan Speck**
Job Title: Head of Maintenance for Chardon local schools, Ohio

What I Do in my Job: I oversee a team of custodians who work to keep the seven schools in our district clean and safe for kids.

My schedule is always changing. One day I'll be drilling 18-inch holes in a school playground to make way for new equipment, and the next day I'll be fixing a broken boiler.

Community Involvement: I'm always volunteering for the district, the schools, our local association, community organizations, and my church. I've helped redo three school playgrounds, much of it on my own time.

I also oversee the Chardon Association of Classified Employees Pancake Breakfast, which raised $3,000 in college scholarships this year for our high school seniors.

For four Sundays in a row, we serve pancakes in one of the school's cafeterias and invite the community. I always get stuck with grill duty, but it's a labor of love. Folks line up outside the cafeteria doors just to pay their $5 toward the cause and eat our homemade food. Our teachers are especially supportive of the event.

Biggest Passion: Kids. People know that if there's a cause that supports our kids, I'll be there.

I love my job because I get to make sure they have a fun and safe environment. I also love getting involved with my community because I know I'm making a difference. There's no better feeling than that. ✔

Duncan Scott

Ohioan Stephan Speck heads up maintenance by day and works to fund student scholarships after hours.

great relationship with the district teachers. And once the board and administrators saw all the support we had, they told the district to find the dollars."

Beyond the pay and benefits, the local board now realizes that "SCEA is an organization to negotiate with," says Brown, a computer lab assistant at Los Ranchitos Elementary School.

"All our members live in the district, and we negotiate in good faith. People know that we're here to support our children in whatever ways we can," adds Brown. "It doesn't matter whether it's a food service person, a custodian, or a teacher aide: Our members enjoy working with children. It's that simple."

SCEA's concerns also go beyond schools and into the community, where members are active in fighting pollution from a beryllium plant.

"Our members are working to gain pollution-monitoring devices for five district schools that are located near the plant," Brown explains. "We also want the county to tighten pollution standards.

Although Tony Silvain got what he wanted and retired on August 3, after completing a two-year term as the association's president, he plans to continue working with the Association as a lifetime retired member and as a Central Labor Council delegate. He also plans to continue helping collect school supplies for Yacci school children in Mexico.

"I may be retired, but there's still a lot of work to do," Silvain adds. ✔

have access to necessary items through spring.

After working more than a year without a contract, members of the Baldwinsville Educational Support Professionals Association in New York state are fighting for a living wage by conducting information picketing at school open houses and school board meetings.

BESPA represents 225 teaching assistants, clerical staff, nurses, and aides in the school district.

The average full-time annual salary for BESPA members is $17,000, and some members make as little as $15,000.

With the slogan, "Working with our children in our community," the campaign has received positive press coverage and community support.

Sarah Benoit, a veteran nurse of 30 years, sums up the sentiment of the campaign: "The children are well taken care of, and all of us in this group need to be paid what we're worth. We're professionals."

RESOURCES

Fresh off the Press
A new series of booklets on *Building a Quality Workforce* is available from the NEA. Readers can find ideas and models for fighting against privatization, and for creating professional development opportunities. Also included are extensive lists of Web sites and other sources for further help. So far, the NEA has published booklets for food services staff, bus drivers, custodians, and a similar booklet for paraeducators called *The NEA Paraeducator Handbook*. Four more publications—for clerical and secretarial ESP, health services, higher education support professionals, and skilled trades—will be ready by next spring. Booklets for the other ESP job categories are scheduled for publication within 18 months. The booklets are available on the Web at www.nea.org/esp. Printed copies can be obtained through Uniserv staff.

New from NEA
Asthma, a chronic disease that affects one in 13 children, is a concern to many of our members. Spread the word about a terrific new website—www.asthmandschools.org—created by NEA's Health Information Network. It features asthma resources, guidance, and advice to anyone who regularly interacts with children—along with fact sheets on how to spot an asthma flare up, information on school-based asthma education programs, materials about asthma in different languages, and tips on how to create an asthma action plan for your school.

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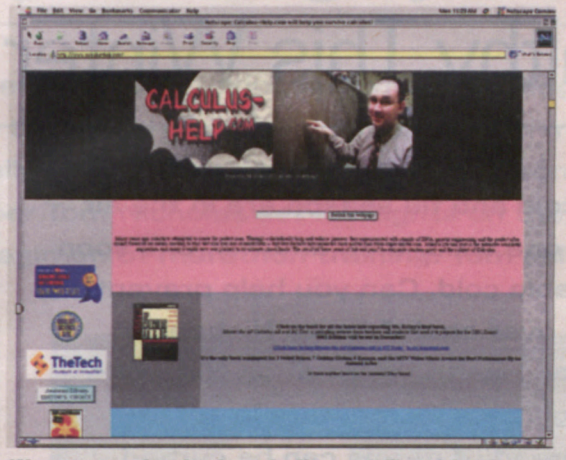
Go Figure with This Site

I am the Webmaster of a Web resource for high school calculus teachers.

I've spent the last few years building this Web site. My goal was to create an online archive of calculus help that presents a sense of humor, is approachable, understandable, and exhibits what a single teacher can do with a Web presence.

I would like to make my site known to students and teachers alike, because the site can be an asset as an at-home resource. My commitment is a free Web site that entertains as well as educates and provides new and engaging content every week of the school year. Try it by going to www.calculus-help.com.



Want a good calculus challenge? Try this site: www.calculus-help.com.

Michael Kelley
mikekelley@chesapeake.net
Prince Frederick, Maryland

Powering Up

My tip is to use Powerpoint to teach word-decoding. I made slide shows, each concentrating on one rhyme—"___at" words. The beginning sound first appears on the screen with a text font and sound of my choice. Then the latter part of the words appear on the screen while moving to the left to join the beginning letter.

The kids love this and think it's very cool to sound out and blend words. It's especially fun when I've inserted the sound of a race car!

Jana Cagle
First grade teacher
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Technology Integration

Wouldn't it be helpful to have Web sites for your entire curriculum in one convenient place to use when you need them without having to remember the URLs?

As the computer teacher in an elementary school, I surveyed all the K-2 teachers in our school for Web sites they would like to use for classroom instruction. I asked the teacher to select Web sites that would enhance their content area curriculum, categorize them by subject area and give a brief description.

After receiving the list from the teachers, I sorted and compiled the Web sites. Some of the sites include authors, math, math flash cards, search engines, Spanish, science, and lesson plan Web sites. I also included any technology workshop information that I had presented to teachers.

I then posted these sites onto our school Web site: http://mtsd.k12.nj.us/ves/websites.htm. Teachers can then conveniently go to our school Web site and link to their favorite Web site from their classroom without having to type, store, or remember the URL. Teachers don't have to search for their URL on scraps of paper, find the sites in their list of favorites, or type a URL with 30 characters. All they have to remember is our school Web site: www.mtsd.k12.nj.us.

The sites are available with just a few clicks. As the year progresses, I hope to add more Web sites.

Violet Markmann
Computer teacher
Skillman, New Jersey

Writing from the South

One of my favorite Web sites is www.southernvoices.org, the official site of "Southern Voices," a high-quality, professionally designed and laid out anthology of writing by high school students from 10 Southern states.

This site not only allows me to present real-world exemplars of student writing and provide a potential real audience for my own students' work, it also features "Lessons and Prompts," sample writing activities designed by teachers Gerry Wilson and Bill Brown, and "Interviews" with established major writers including, Jill McCorkle, Andrew Hudgins, and T.R. Pearson.

"Southern Voices" is especially relevant to my own students and others in the Southern region, but the voices that speak in its pages will appeal to writers and readers anywhere—they are some of the very best to be found in cyberspace and all regions beyond.

Edwin Epps
eepps@spart7.k12.sc.us
High school English teacher
Spartanburg, South Carolina

Three Great Sites

My very favorite Web site is www.teacherweb.com, because you can create your very own Web site for your class.

TeacherWeb.com has a terrific support staff; I've E-mailed a couple of different questions to them, and I've always heard back from them within a day. Both my students and their parents check the site regularly for homework, letters, links, announcements, and even pictures of my students' work.

Another site I like is www.Lizardpoint.cm/fun/geoquiz/usaquiz.html because it it contains a map game that helps students to learn the location of the 50 states. This site also has a menu bar with games to help the children learn the locations of other countries.

My third favorite: www.funbrain.com.

Pam Chapman-Locke
Dragonlocke341@cs.com
Fifth grade teacher
Cupertino, California

My favorite Web site

Here's a site that allows teachers to post resources, assignments, and important messages for students and their parents. No passwords are needed to view the site. You just enter your zip code to set up the page and access a variety of tools. Check out www.schoolnotes.

Jennifer Lee
Language arts teacher
Louisville, Kentucky

TALK TO US

Have a nifty classroom tip or lesson plan that uses technology? E-mail a description (under 200 words, please!) to wiredclassroom@list.nea.org.

Is there a Web site, CD-ROM, or piece of software you can't live without? E-mail your favorites—and why you love them—to my favoritetech@list.nea.org.

Or send your responses by regular mail to *NEA Today*, or by Fax to 202/822-7206, or through the Web at www.nea.org/cet.

Those published here will receive a sparkling *NEA Today* mug!

Bytes for Beginners

I'd like to know what the rules are for using personal software in my classroom. Are there any procedures I have to go through to get my software approved for use in my class?

Every district and school maintains different policy with regard to this question. So, it would be wise to seek the advice and council of your administrator—or better yet, curriculum/department chair or technology coordinator--prior to engaging students in learning via non-district-approved software. Here are a few reasons why:

• Your district may have implemented strict curriculum guidelines that extend to educational software (benchmarks, rubrics, etc.)

• You may have signed Acceptable Use Policies (AUP) containing language that prohibits you from installing or running personal software on school computers and/or networks, a liability issue (the computer or network on which the software was installed crashes or contracts a virus).

• Some software programs require you to obtain a special license before using them in a classroom or other public setting. If you install and run software without the appropriate license and are found out, you and/or your colleague could be held liable for violating software copyright laws or licensing agreements.

Is there a way to retreive my E-mail even when I'm away from my own computer?

You can easily retrieve your E-mail even when you're away from your home computer and don't have a laptop. You do need a computer with Internet access. Once on the Net, log on to www.mail2web.com and simply put in two things. First is your E-mail address and second, your password for that account. That's it. You don't have to sign in, log on, or register with them. The site will have your messages. You can respond to them or not. It will leave your messages on the server so that when you do get home, you can file them, print them, or delete them. It is free to everyone. The company get its revenues from ads on the site.

Encouraging Hand-Washing To Keep You And Your Class Healthy This Winter

Achoo! Sniffle, sniffle. The sounds of cold and flu season are in the air and in your classroom. It starts with one child, then another, and soon you have every symptom of a miserable cold. Can you help prevent this familiar cycle from happening all over again? Laura Nieboer, a consultant for the National Education Association Health Information Network, spoke to Mary Lou Dishop, a school nurse at Highlands Elementary in Wilmington, Delaware. Dishop says, yes, the spread of germs can be curbed, and it all begins with the proper washing of hands. Was mom right all along?

What exactly does hand-washing have to do with not getting sick?

Everything, especially when you're talking about colds and flu. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, it's the most important thing you can do to keep from getting sick. You catch the cold your students have because your hands pick up their germs, and then you rub your nose or eyes and the cold virus gets into your body. If your students wash their hands, and you wash yours, you can dramatically reduce the number of germs spread throughout your class.

Aaron Meshon

Is there any specific hand-washing method that works best?

Yes. I'm always surprised by how many students don't know how to properly wash their hands. They either don't get their hands wet first or they're not washing between their fingers. To teach proper hand-washing technique, I go into classrooms every year to give a refresher course. I stress counting to ten to ensure that the soap and scrubbing action has had enough time to dislodge the germs. For younger children, singing a song, such as "Happy Birthday," helps them not rush through the process.

I also post signs near sinks in my school that remind staff and students to wash their hands, and I give them tips to ensure it's done correctly. I also teach children to cough and sneeze into their arm if there isn't a tissue available. This decreases the number of germs on their hands that can be spread.

Kids can be impatient or forgetful. How can we motivate them to wash their hands regularly and properly?

Once students know how to wash their hands, teachers need to set up routines to ensure that it gets done. As soon as children walk in the door, they should put their stuff away, then head to the sink to lather up. After recess is another great time for an all-classroom trip to the sink.

To encourage students to wash their hands at other times—after sneezing or using the toilet—it helps for them to understand why washing hands is so important.

An activity or science experiment is a great visual lesson in how germs spread and how soap and water help fight them.

At my school, we use bananas and colored chalk dust to demonstrate to kids how germs spread.

We'll have a child lightly rub a peeled banana between his or her hands, and then shake on some chalk dust.

As the day goes on, the dust spreads child to child, desk to desk. At the end of the experiment and before clean-up, the children count how many of them have dust on their hands, faces, or desks.

You can also wet your hand, sprinkle some glitter on, and then shake hands with several children—and then have them shake hands with other students. This make-believe "chain of germs" will travel a great distance throughout a school day.

To show how "sticky" germs can be, rub a little petroleum jelly mixed with cinnamon or paprika on each child's hand. Then have the children wash their hands until they can see that the "germs" have disappeared. ✔

Proper Hand-Washing Techniques

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control offers these instructions for proper hand-washing:

- Use soap and running water.
- Rub your hands vigorously as you wash them (10-15 seconds, soap should be bubbly).
- Wash all surfaces, including the backs of hands, between fingers, and under fingernails.
- Rinse well and leave the water running until after drying hands.
- Dry your hands with a paper towel.
- Turn off the water using the paper towel.

If your classroom doesn't have running water, two products can help keep hands clean and germ-free. First, baby wipes or towelettes can be used to wipe dirt away. Then follow up with a waterless hand-washing solution. They kill germs when used in the recommended amounts and when rubbed in completely.

RESOURCES

- **"Arthur Conquers a Cut." Featuring Arthur and his friends, this videotape teaches K-3rd-grade students about hygiene and first aid. A teacher's resource guide has classroom activity sheets, follow-up ideas, and additional sources of information. Price: $15 plus s&h. Stock #7709-1-00. To order, call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200 or go to www.nea.org/books.**

Web Sites

- **American Academy of Pediatrics. This web site–www.aap.org–features information on a variety of children's health topics.**
- **Health Finder. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services web site with online publications, clearinghouses, databases, web links, and support groups: www.healthfinder.gov.**

Conquering the Mighty Marathon

For many fitness enthusiasts, taking on a new challenge is the essence of motivation. In the world of running, completing a marathon, an arduous race of 26 miles, 385 yards, is the zenith of accomplishment. This year, NEA member Tom Nicholas set his sights on the legendary race and began the grueling regimen of marathon training. Tom achieved his goal, and he's ready for more.

NEA member Tom Nicholas is a school social worker and former teacher at Bennet Middle School in Manchester, Connecticut.

An avid runner, Nicholas decided this year to shoot for the supreme runners' achievement: completing a marathon.

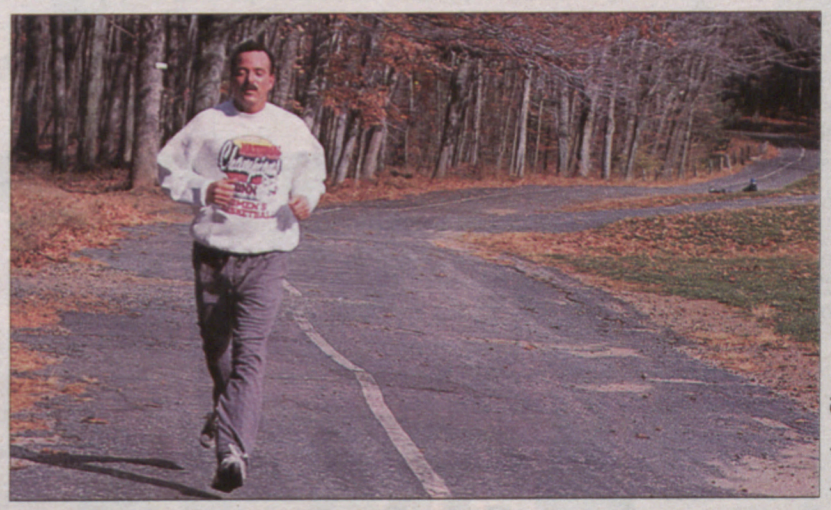
"I was in fairly decent shape due to my normal exercise routine," says Nicholas. "A marathon is something I've always wanted to do. I admire the ancient runners, such as the Native Americans who brought messages between tribes. It is one of the ultimate physical accomplishments."

The main obstacle for Nicholas was time. Marathon training takes hours each day, and working in a middle school doesn't always afford him that liberty.

"I work in a big school where I am constantly busy," says Nicholas. "Working out helps me a lot in coping with the daily stress of my job, but the hardest part is making time for it. I give myself the time, though, because I know I'm going to function better at home and at school."

Nicholas chose the Nashville Country Music Marathon for the big test, and to help motivate himself to train, he teamed up with a friend and teacher in Nashville. The two kept track of each other's progress via E-mail.

The training paid off. When race day came, in April, Nicholas completed the marathon in Nashville. He was so invigorated by the experience that he decided to go a step further; he entered the prestigious Boston Marathon and is currently in training again.



Jonathan Olsen

Connecticut NEA member Tom Nicholas completed his first marathon in April, and is now preparing for the acclaimed Boston Marathon.

Nicholas explains that for the bigger marathons, such as Boston's, one must have a very fast qualifying time in order to compete.

"My qualifying time is that of a 70-year-old woman," Nicholas laughingly admits. "But the marathon allows folks like me to compete by partnering with an organization. Boston's Home for Little Wanderers is sponsoring me for the Boston Marathon. I raise funds for their organization and they give me a slot in the race."

Little Wanderers is a private, nonprofit child and family service agency devoted to providing support to more than 11,000 children and families annually through residential care, special education, and community-based services.

Nicholas chose this agency in order to extend his commitment to helping children beyond his own school community.

Even when he's not training for a marathon, Nicholas exercises three to four times a week. His observations about the benefits of regular exercise are useful even if running a marathon is not a realistic option for many.

"I notice a difference in myself if I'm not exercising regularly," says Nicholas. "My energy isn't as high. My clarity of thought is not as good. Exercise is a huge stress reliever for me.

"I believe that the mind, body, soul, and spirit must be in balance for your whole person to be healthy. If you don't take care of yourself, you cannot take care of others." ✔

—Kandra Strauss
NEA Health Information Network

Quick Tip

Sameta Rush

Water is vital when exercising. Your cells and cellular fluids must stay hydrated with *water*. Dehydration can quickly cause headaches, nausea, and fatigue. Here are some important tips for proper hydration:

1. Prehydrate. Drink a lot of water before school or any activity and allow ample time for visiting the restroom.

2. Buy good stuff. If you are used to reaching for a can of soda or a cup of coffee, try putting some flavored mineral water or sparkling water in the lounge instead.

3. Squeeze a lemon, lime, or orange slice in your water. Add ice. Make it a joyful ritual.

4. Get an inexpensive water bottle carrier and use it. Most of them even have a small pocket for carrying that bundle of building keys we manage.

Sameta Rush teaches physical education, video production, and writing at Steamboat Springs High School and Strawberry Park Elementary, Steamboats Springs, Colorado. E-mail her at srush@sailors.steamboat.k12.co.us

NEA·HIN

From the **NEA Health Information Network**

■ NEW DRUG PREVENTION POSTERS AIMED AT YOUTH AND ADULTS

Three new drug prevention posters aimed at adults and youth are now available free of charge from the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. The two youth posters feature young people and their anti-drugs—the thing that stands between them and using drugs. The examples are skateboarding and softball. The adult poster urges parents to ask more questions about how their children spend their free time. To order up to five of each poster, send an E-mail to ondcp@ncjrs.gov or call 800/666-3332 or fax your request to 301/519-5212. When ordering, please reference the document numbers: Skateboarding poster (youth)–NCJ 188566; Softball poster (youth)–NCJ 188567; or Questions poster (adults)–NCJ 188568.

■ CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS

This fast-paced video gives teens information on abstinence and the most common methods of birth control. It features real teens discussing their choices and concerns about sex and contraception. Price: $15 plus s&h. Stock #A05-9001-2-00. To order, call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200 or go to www.nea.org/books.

■ "TAKING CARE OF YOUR HEALTH" TIP SHEETS

The Council on Family Health, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating consumers about the proper use of prescription and nonprescription drugs, as well as other issues of personal health and safety, offers fact sheets on immunizations, safe and responsible medicine and dietary supplement use, avoiding drug interactions, and the importance of reading medicine labels. The tip sheets are based on the Spanish-language "Taking Care of Your Health" radio series developed in collaboration with Prevencion, Inc. They are available at www.chfino.org.

Students Find Teacher's 'Mr. Right'

Oregon's **Clair Wiles** didn't have much time for a social life, so her cupid-playing students took it upon themselves to give her one.

During one study hall, Wiles recalls, several students were using the Internet to research term papers. "I was preparing lesson plans, so I was kind of in a fog," she says. When she got to the computer to see what they were doing, the students had just pushed the "send" button, launching information about her to the personals section of America Online.

"I was horrified," says the third-year global studies teacher and Navy veteran, "but I figured it was all in fun and nothing would come out of it."

The next day, Wiles received 40 E-mail messages from potential suitors. "I told the students that they were responsible for going through them," she says. After one disastrous date, she told the students no more. Then she read an E-mail from Kevin Wiles.

"He e-mailed a picture of himself with his two dogs, said he liked country music and worked in Eugene," she says. "I figured it was worth a shot."

After eight months of dating—including time spent chaperoning dances and school events together—Kevin proposed. On May 12, they wed on the stage of the high school's auditorium, with 150 guests looking on. Her student matchmakers also performed a one-act play about the couple's courtship before they said their vows.

"There was no way we could get married without inviting the students," she says. "It was an incredibly memorable experience." ✔

Photos by Chris Pietsch

Leo Sorel

Offering Relief in New York City

When Rhode Island's **Carol Anderhaggen** retired in 1999 after 28 years as a library media specialist, she knew she wasn't ready to sit at home. So she took her love of technology to the Red Cross—where she's been volunteering as a disaster computer operator.

She's worked hurricanes, fires, and plane crashes, but nothing compares to her assignment that began September 12 in New York City.

"It's the largest disaster response that Red Cross has ever been involved with," says Anderhaggen, who is one of nine computer operators overseeing the computer programs that are being used by the more than 1,500 Red Cross volunteers and employees to track everything from transportation to staffing to communications.

"The days are long and it can be hard emotionally," says Anderhaggen, "but I'm doing something valuable." ✔

Protecting Our Retirements

Nebraska's **John Jensen** and Connecticut's **Clare Barnett** are safeguarding retirement funds for more than 13 million education and Association employees across the country. They are the first teachers and NEA members to serve as president and president-elect, respectively, of the National Council on Teacher Retirement (NCTR).

It's been over three decades since the NCTR board—which oversees pension funds worth more than $1.3 trillion—has had a president, much less two, from the teacher ranks.

"It's our goal to form a coalition this year to educate all school and Association employees about pension and retirement issues," says Jensen, a science research teacher at Omaha South High School who stepped in as the temporary NCTR president this fall.

"There are very real threats against our pension plans, which are often the largest assets we have as educators," says Barnett, a social studies coordinator at Danbury High School who was elected to begin her presidential term in 2005. ✔

Alec Thigpen

Formula for Fulfillment

Henry Brown knows what it's like to be "at-risk."

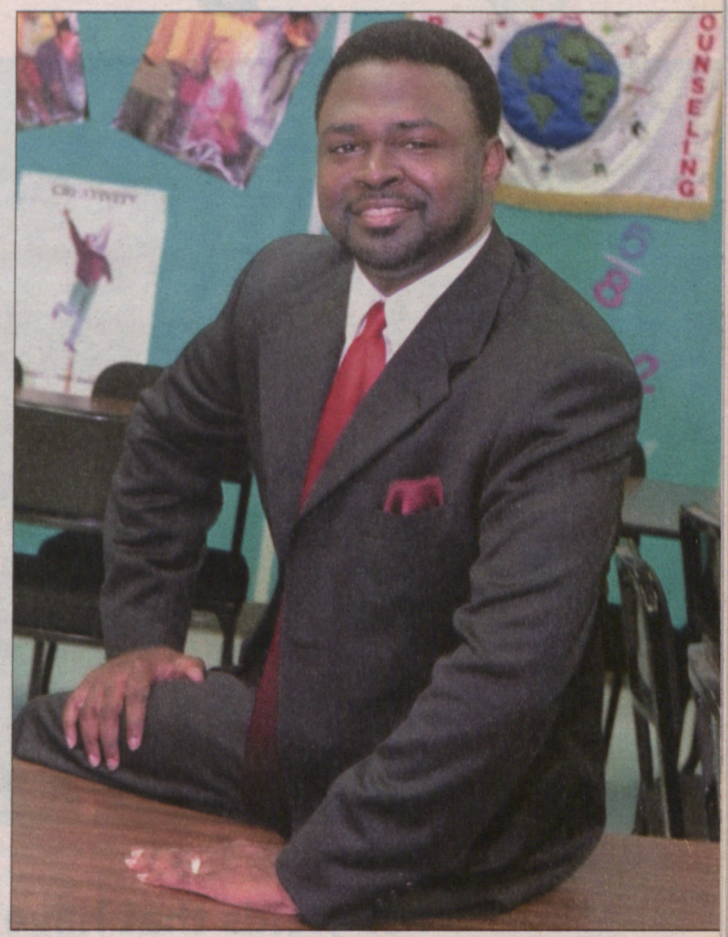
"I was an angry child who could pacify my feelings only by being disruptive in school," says Brown, a math and personal development teacher at Hallandale Adult Alternative High School in Hallandale Beach. "But my seventh grade teacher saved me. I would probably be dead or in jail if not for her."

Brown didn't set out to be a teacher. "I was getting my business degree from Albany State University in Georgia when I started a tutoring program for at-risk kids in the neighborhood," he says. "I knew then that it didn't matter what the pay was, it mattered that I was fulfilled."

For nine years, Brown has been instrumental in developing unique hands-on learning solutions at Hallandale to engage and excite his students about learning. In just one year, his students raised their standardized math test scores by 40 percent.

"My students need to equate what they are learning to the real world," says the *USA Today*-honored teacher. "So I bring in tires to teach them about the area of a circle, or use intensive tasks like plotting gardens and designing sheds to reinforce basic math skills."

He's also set up a mentorship program for young boys to "help them make the transition from boyhood to manhood," he says. "A lot of them don't have fathers in their lives and are dealing with personal hurt that can easily turn into rage if it's not addressed." ✔



Andrew Itkoff

Stories by Dina S. Gómez

'Have Art, Will Travel'

Idaho's **Jennifer Williams**, isn't just a high school art teacher. She's on a mission to bring art into the lives of as many children as possible.

For 27 years, Williams, a 30-year veteran at Nampa's Skyview High School, has been doing "Project Van Go," a free-to-schools program she created that brings art—including mask-making, murals, weaving, pottery—to students and parents in rural communities across Idaho and Nevada.

"I go to a lot of one- and two-room schools that have fewer than ten children," she says. "Many kids are from families who have little access to art supplies or art projects."

Williams also brings some of her own students with her as assistants to "expose them to life outside of our community," she says. Williams makes about a dozen trips a year.

Before 1993, Williams funded all of the costs of the program, including substitute pay, herself. Since then, she's received several large grants to sustain the program, including a $27,000 Unsung Hero award from the Northern Life Insurance Company. ✔

Photos by Andrew Rafkind

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Agreeing on Finances; A Good Time To Buy Bonds?

Q: I am 35 years old and divorced. A wonderful man wants to marry me. What's stopping me is that I do not want to have to account for every penny I spend like I did with my ex-husband.

A: No one should have to account for every penny they spend. Money is the biggest cause of stress and conflict in most marriages. You must know that because yours didn't survive it.

No two people see money the same way. Some people can't stand to be in debt. Others can't stand to pass up a bargain. The key is to talk it out first and then respect each other's style and be willing to compromise.

Couples should be alert to the way money can camouflage more emotional issues such as whether to have a child or buy a house. One partner may say they can't afford a child instead of expressing ambivalence about having another child.

Relocating, retiring, switching careers, taking vacations at the in-laws, all of these are about much more than money.

You've had a bad experience and you don't want to repeat it. I suggest you say it just that way. You need to have some money of your own, at least initially. And perhaps you'll be a little more sensitive to questions about how much something costs. If you want your new marriage to work, I think you've got to be honest about that. The more a couple airs financial issues in advance, the better the chance of success for the marriage.

Q: Is this the right time to buy bonds?

A: In one sense, any time is the right time to buy bonds. Bonds, especially short-term bonds, provide a good diversifier for a stock portfolio.

But I suspect that what you're asking is whether bonds are going to have a good run over the near future. I don't know. When you buy bonds as a speculator, you're betting that interest rates will decline. Declining interest rates send bond prices up.

The Federal Reserve reduced interest rates seven times this year through early September. If you bet bonds will continue to appreciate, you're betting on further interest rate cuts and further economic decline. I don't think I can predict things like that, so I don't make those kinds of bets.

Q: At what age should children open a savings account at the bank and how much of their money should they save?

A: It depends on the child but I'd say six years old is the minimum. Children younger than six don't understand how a dime can be worth more than a penny, for example. I think it's a waste of time trying to teach these concepts to very young children, although they should still go along to the bank or on grocery trips so they start to get an idea of how you trade money for goods.

When your kids are ready, be sure to find a bank that doesn't have a minimum fee for small accounts. Kids shouldn't be forced to save everything they make. It destroys their incentive. My daughter opened a savings account when she was eight, and she was more than ready. She wanted to make a trip to the bank every time she'd put together a couple of dollars. The folks in the bank praised her profusely. When she began working part-time, she increased her savings to nearly half of what she earned.

My son likes to buy Gameboy and Nintendo games better than he likes to save money. He opened a savings account when he was seven although he wasn't all that eager. He saved $1 of his allowance when he got $5 a week and he saves the same $1 out of his current $10 allowance. I tell him saving 10 percent is a good lifetime habit.

Q: Are penny stocks the way to go for a beginner?

A: No. Penny stocks are those that trade for under five bucks a share on the "pink sheets," rather than being listed on any stock exchange. Pink sheets refer to the color of the publication where the prices are listed. Penny stocks are not a bargain.

Mary Rowland is an author and contributor to several financial planning magazines. E-mail your personal finance questions to MoneyQuestions@neamb.com.

Thrifty Educator

This month's Thrifty Educator tip comes from Lisa Mayton, Head Start teacher at Longdale Elementary School in Glen Allen, Virginia.

"I use One-Zip plastic bags to help organize my art activities. I copy patterns on construction paper and place them in a bag. Then I tape a finished copy of the project on the outside of the bag and place it in the students' art activity center. They are able to complete the project on their own using the model and patterns provided.

I also use these One-Zip bags to store a set of supplies for each student's personal use. I can store an extra set of clothes for my children in the larger two-gallon plastic bags.

These bags work well for an inexpensive means of keeping everything neat and organized and they help teach children responsibility for taking care of their own materials.

Got an idea?

If you have a suggestion for how your colleagues can save money at school, send it along to neatoday@nea.org.

The NEA Valuebuilder Program has helped NEA members accumulate more than $780 million for their retirement.

Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits

Looking for ways to pump up your tax advantages with tax season drawing near? Significant changes to retirement programs for 2002 resulting from the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 can start you on your way.

The biggest impact of this law for NEA members is how it affects 403(b) Tax Sheltered Accounts, commonly known as TSAs.

Elective deferral limits for TSAs have increased to $11,000 in 2002. This amount will increase by $1,000 per year until 2006, capping at $15,000. In addition, individuals over age 50 can deposit up to an extra $1,000 into their programs.

This over-50 bonus amount will also increase by $1,000 per year until 2006, when it reaches $5,000. An employee with 15 or more years of service with their current employer may still be eligible for a $3,000 per year catch-up that was allowed under the old rules.

The new law also eliminates the Maximum Exclusion Allowance (MEA) contribution limitation formula and increases the defined contribution percentage to 100 percent of compensation effective in 2002.

Coupled with the new deferral limits, these changes mean that most plan participants will be able to increase their annual TSA contributions beginning this year.

To find out how these changes can benefit you, call your NEA Valuebuilder Representative or the NEA Valuebuilder Service Center toll free at 800/NEA-VALU, Monday-Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Central Time.

America's Public Schools Under Attack

Author challenges critics who want to dismantle, not reform.

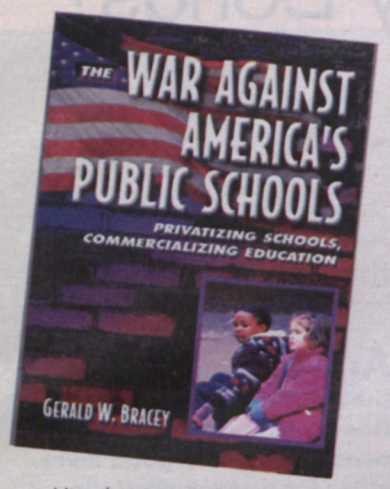
EXCERPT

"A war is being waged on America's public schools. They are under siege. Sometimes the war doesn't look like a war because it is a war waged mostly in the polite language of academic debates. Sometimes it is waged in the polite terms of new 'partnerships,' but it is a war nonetheless."

THE WAR AGAINST AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS—PRIVATIZING SCHOOLS, COMMERCIALIZING EDUCATION

By **Gerald W. Bracey**

213 pp. $24 (Allyn and Bacon) To order call 800/666-9433



There's nothing polite about Gerald Bracey's detailed description of the impact of vouchers, charters, and the profit-making education industry on our K-12 schools. The Stanford-educated research psychologist's book offers an eye-opening account of the motives, the money, and the questionable legal and ethical maneuverings behind the push to privatize and commercialize public education.

From the outset, Bracey admits public schools need reform. "Too many schools still bore too many kids," he says. But, he adds, the real agenda of many "enemies of public schools" is to dismantle, not reform the current system. "Getting the government out of schools is part of the conservative agenda," Bracey says. He chastises political and religious conservatives, big business and some in higher education for using "distorted" testing data to label public schools as "failing." It's one way, he says, to grab educational dollars for charters, vouchers, for-profit alternatives, and even academic research.

Such misinterpretation of data is rampant, says Bracey, citing scores on the SATs, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) as ripe for misuse. Blasting U.S. 12th graders for a low worldwide ranking in science is absurd, Bracey says, because of the vast international differences in curriculum and student participation. Top-ranked Scandinavian students study three times as much physics as their U.S. counterparts and most countries picked the cream of their student crop for two out of three TIMSS tests. The United States was only one of five countries with a representative sample for all exams. Bracey likens the TIMSS rankings to comparing "apples to aardvarks."

His chapter on charter schools, publicly funded but free of bureaucracy, tells of wasted money, little accountability, and not much innovation. Bracey cites a common scenario: "The visionary opens a charter without the practical management skills to operate it, burns out, and turns the school over to a private, for-profit school-management firm." These firms, he says, are famous for canned curriculum and low teacher salaries.

Faced with weak, short-staffed oversight agencies, school districts have granted charters while paying little attention to evaluation, says Bracey. A UCLA study found schools lost charters for financial irregularities, not for failure to meet academic goals. And, he adds, when successful practices do emerge they rarely spread to public schools, as they should in theory, because there's seldom a mechanism for sharing information.

Although most for-profit education firms have failed to emerge from the red, there's great money-making potential, says Bracey, especially with the ongoing effort to erode confidence in public schools. Since our schools impart a common idea of good citizenship, he's concerned that for-profit schools, lacking public scrutiny of curriculum and finances, might pose "a threat to democracy." And, he has no faith that the private sector will treat education any differently than manufacturing where, he says, "neglect of standards and quality in favor of profits is the order of the day."

Voucher programs have faced voter opposition, court challenges and heated debate at the federal level. Now some are steering clear of the "voucher" nametag, but, no matter what it's called, the program still drains money and students from public schools. Like charters, voucher programs have largely avoided evaluation, adds Bracey. "It is more than a bit ironic that choice advocates, claiming the public schools need to be more accountable, have thus far largely succeeded in avoiding accountability for their own endeavors."

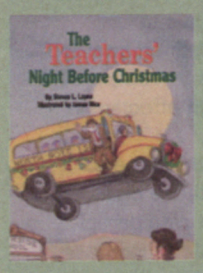
Dense with facts and figures about all the major players and issues in the privatizing/charter debate, Bracey's newest work is a great handbook for besieged public school educators and advocates. He doesn't pretend to offer solutions for needed reform—just a warning that public schools are in danger and much too precious to let go without a fight. ✔

—Mary Anne Hess

BOOKS by NEA Members

The Teachers' Night Before Christmas

By Steven L. Layne



This pedagogical twist on the Christmas classic will delight teachers and students everywhere. The traditional school Christmas pageant, students visiting nursing homes, crafts, etc., all end in chaos while the teachers struggle to maintain order, and after school, get their own shopping done. In a whimsical touch, Santa arrives in his flying school bus to save the day and honor the teachers for their selfless devotion to their students. $14.95 from Pelican Publishing Company. Order toll free at 800/843-1724 or 888/5-PELICAN. Or visit www.pelicanpub.com.

The Sad Night
The Story of an Aztec Victory and a Spanish Loss

By Sally Schofer Mathews

In this striking picture book, the author traces the Aztec presence in Mexico from the mythic origins of the Aztec Empire to the recent discovery of gold lost by the Spaniards on that fateful night—*The Sad Night*—the last battle the Aztecs won against the Spaniards. This unforgettable tale is accompanied by eloquent, detailed illustrations rendered in the style of Aztec codex art. $6.95 from Clarion Books. To order go to www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/cgi-bin/SaCGI.cgi/catalog.class?FNC=ResultDetails_ASearchResults_html_111065.

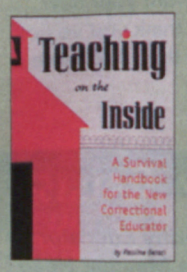
Surviving Hitler
A Boy in the Nazi Death Camps

By Andrea Warren

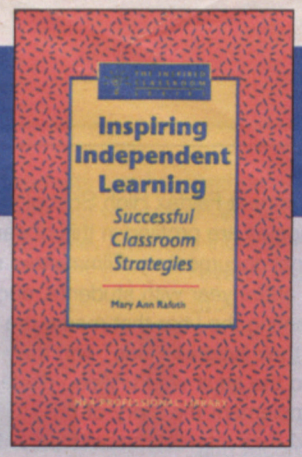
Award-winning author Andrea Warren powerfully evokes the experiences of a boy growing up in the Holocaust. Told from the rarely published male point of view, this is a fascinating and deeply moving true story. *Surviving Hitler* will change the way you see tolerance, forgiveness, and the Holocaust. Readers will learn one boy's secret to surviving both death and heartbreak. For ages 10 up. $16.95 from HarperCollins Children's Books. Order online at www.harperchildrens.com.

Teaching on the Inside
A Survival Handbook for the New Correctional Educator

By Pauline Geraci



Teaching on the Inside provides an overview of what it can be like to teach in a correctional setting. It introduces new teachers to inmate culture and its significance to correctional education. The author, a recipient of the Marvin Sull Award in both 1999 and 2001 for creative teaching that impacts inmates in the classroom and the community, depicts her true life experiences as a correctional educator. $12.95 plus $3 s&h. Write to: Greystone Educational Materials, P.O. Box 86, Scandia, MN 55073; phone 800/733-0671.



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EXCERPT

Research has shown that the knowledge of study skills, acquisition of learning strategies, and their successful application in the classroom separate children who achieve from children who do not to a greater extent than does ability or IQ. Successful students know how to study, prepare for exams, identify important information in teacher "talk," and monitor their own learning. Peer tutoring is one effective means to increase academic achievement, and it benefits both the tutor and the target student.

How can you teach your students to learn without turning your class into a study skills lab? *Inspiring Independent Learning* shows you how to foster independent learning in your classroom through easy, often subtle techniques that gently place responsibility for learning in the hands of the students. This book provides numerous strategies to use with students in grades K-12, as well as activities and record forms for classroom use.

To order, call 800/229-4200, or check the Web at www.nea.org/books.

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Some Essential Strategies

For elementary school teachers seeking to make their classroom climates more learner friendly, *Teach Our Children Well* is a practical guide that details the seven essential features of a positive classroom community—rapport, tradition, pride of place, a sense of belonging, a standard of personal best, academic engagement, and support to independence. Specific examples, strategies, and projects that draw on diverse cultural backgrounds, anecdotes, photos, and student work samples come from urban classrooms where teachers have been instrumental in creating supportive learning communities. $15 from Heinemann, 603/431-7894, www.heinemann.com.

Waxing Philosophical

Greek Philosophers, published by Oxford University Press, contains essays on three of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It provides a valuable introduction to the work of these three thinkers whose arguments and insights continue to engage the liveliest minds of our time. Each of this book's three authors provides a thorough section on a single philosopher, and the confluence of these studies will help readers understand these great thinkers both individually and in the context of each other. $16.95. To order, go to www.oup-usa.org/isbn/0192854224.html.

Supporting Self

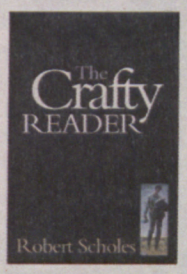
There Is Nothing Wrong With You For Teens, a self-help book specifically written for teens, demonstrates how we all are the products of our social conditioning—we are our own worst critics. You can learn how to move past this socialized self-hate and embrace your real, "authentic" self. Appropriate reading for young people, ages 12 and up, as well as for parents, educators, and all adults who care about teenagers. $12 plus s&h from Keep It Simple Books at www. thezencenter.org/tinwwyft.html.

Web Site Construction

Building A School Web site offers a fgriendly and accurate guide to building a school Web site. It includes topics such as basic HTML, Web editor, search engine placement, bandwidth, and animation. You will learn the power and responsibility of publishing. Make your way across the digital divide! $12.95 from Duomo Press. Order online at www.duomo press.com. Discounts for multiple copies.

Reading As Craft

The Crafty Reader deals with reading not as an art or performance given by a virtuoso reader, but as a craft that can be studied, taught, and learned. The author stresses that reading depends on using certain tools that can be acquired through practice, and demonstrates how some of these tools work and how they can be acquired. $24.95. To order go to www.yale.edu/yup/books/ 090153.htm.



The Dolls on the Old Stairway

By Brenda Crissman Musick

The book, appropriate for children age 3 to 9 years old, teaches the importance of love, friendship, and caring for belongings. It is a tale about two dolls with life-like qualities who come to live with "Grandma Ro." The entire household is filled with love, fun, and laughter until one doll is taken away. $9.95 plus $1 s&h. To order send check payable to Brenda Musick, P.O. Box 344, Honaker, VA 24260; phone 540/873-4322.

TVTIPS

Othello

PBS, January 28, 9:00 p.m., ET, check local listings.

Based on the tragedy by William Shakespeare, this ExxonMobile Masterpiece Theatre production translates the classic tale of corruption and betrayal into a modern-day setting--New Scotland Yard in the era of race riots, neo-Nazis, and political spin. This *Othello* dramatizing the 1993 killing of a black teenager and a botched police investigation, stars Eammon Walker as John Othello, an officer with the London Metropolitan Police, and Keeley Hawes as Dessie(Desdemona). A companion Web site can be found at www.pbs.org/masterpiece. ✔

KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., provides these listings. For additional listings and information, check the Web at www.kidsnet.org.

TVTIPS

The Planets

A&E, December 31-January 7, 7:00 a.m., ET, check local listings.

Using data and images from the Hubble Space Telescope, computer graphics, and special effects, this eight-part series offers a comprehensive presentation of the solar system. Drawing on consultations with over a thousand astronomers, engineers, scientists, and astronauts, and featuring rare NASA archival footage, this series explores the solar system and the technology that enables us to understand it. A companion Web site can be found at www.AandE.com/class.

Senior Year

PBS, January 11, 10:00 p.m., ET, check local listings.

The lives of 15 diverse high school seniors at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles are profiled in this observational documentary. Filmmakers spent an entire year with students, documenting the year that marks the end of their lives as "kids" and their entry into the adult world. Video diaries supplement the story of the students and their interactions with parents, teachers, and friends.

American Classics

The History Channel, January 14-17, 6:00 a.m., ET, check local listings.

This four-part series from the History Channel Classroom explores American history through examination of the classic icons that define Americans as a nation and the symbols that are important today. The icons examined include the Corvette, the Good Humor Man, Uncle Sam, GI Joe, drive-in movie theaters, Woolworth's Five-and-Dime, Main Street America, Route 66, John Wayne, Marilyn Monroe, and Mohammed Ali. A companion Web site can be found at www.historychannel.com/classroom.

Dragonfly TV

PBS, January 17, ET, check local listings.

This new series features 9- to 12-year-olds investigating science and using the process of science to learn about the world around them. Each episode introduces children to new scientific factoids and features adult scientists displaying their research on similar topics. Viewers are encouraged to join in their investigations via interactive Web activities. A companion Web site can be found at www.dragonflytv.org. In addition, Dragonfly TV experiments and other material can be found in the *Scientific American Explorations* magazine. Study guides are available in the journals of the National Science Teachers Association.

Cyberchase

PBS, January 21, ET, check local listings.

Starring the voices of Christopher Lloyd and Gilbert Gottfried, this new animated series from PBS takes children into the world of cyberspace where classic good-versus-evil battles rage and where children use their minds, not muscle to confront obstacles and solve problems. Each episode takes viewers on an adventure driven by a different math concept—from tackling time in ancient Egyptian tombs, to cracking codes in creepy caves, or making sense of numbers in a fractured world.

The Secret Life Of the Brain

PBS, January 22, 9:00 p.m., ET, check local listings.

This five-part series explores the

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The Blue Planet: Seas of Life

Discovery Channel, January 27, 9-11 p.m. and January 28, 9-11 p.m. ET, check local listings.

Sir David Attenborough wrote and narrates this landmark 8-hour series about the Earth's marine environment. We know less about the oceans than we do about the surface of the moon, yet the seas cover two-thirds of our world. *The Blue Planet: Seas of Life* is a definitive exploration of our planet's oceans and reveals the sea and its inhabitants at their most fearsome and alluring. The other four parts of this eight-part series will air next spring.

FREE OR INEXPENSIVE

Positive Conflict Resolution

This beautifully illustrated picture book tells the story about positive conflict resolution for children of all ages from Carolrhoda Books. *The War*, by Anais Vaugelade, was originally published in France and won the 2001 UNESCO Prize for Children's Literature in the Service of Tolerance and Peace. $15.95 plus s&h from Lerner Publishing Group. To order, call 800/328-4929.

Enchanting Stories of the Middle East

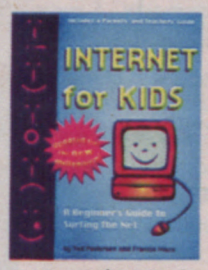
Neem the Half-Boy by Idries Shah is the first in a series of children's books that have captivated the hearts and minds of people from all walks of life. The books are tales from a rich tradition of story telling from Central Asia and the Middle East. Stories told and retold to children, by campfire and candlelight, for more than a thousand years. Through repeated readings, these stories provoke fresh insight and more flexible thought in children. Beautifully illustrated. $17 (hard cover), 32 pp. To order go to www.hoopoekids.com or call 800/222-4745.

For Teachers Everywhere

This small, 5x5 book packs a strong and positive message for teachers everywhere. *The Art of Teaching*, by illustrator Vicky Howard, combines rich illustrations with quotations from Mark Twain, Albert Einstein, Beethoven, Confucius, and others to celebrate teaching and learning. 96 pp. $9.95 from Andrews McMeel Publishing. Call 800/851-8923 to order.

Online Guide

Authors Ted Pedersen and Francis Moss have written a valuable beginners guide to the Internet. *Internet for Kids* is written in simple English with enough illustrations to keep kids interested. There's also a parents' and teachers' guide. 210 pp. $9.99. Order from Price Stern Sloan, a Penguin Putnam book, by calling 800/631-8571.

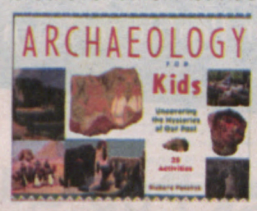


Spellbound

Just out from Stenhouse Publishers is this 72-page paper-bound book with a host of ideas for teaching kids to spell. *The Spelling Teacher's Handbook* mixes the basics of spelling with classroom suggestions for making spelling instruction interesting, enjoyable, and effective. Author Jo Phenix has taught all grade levels. Order from www.stenhouse.com.

Dig This

Here's a book that contains 25 activities designed to build students' interest in archeology. *Archeology for Kids: Uncovering the Mysteries of Our Past, 25 Activities* will help to show students just how archeologists work and what they've discovered over time. Activities include everything from making ancient humanlike footprints to mapping and recording artifacts underwater. Ages 9 and up. 132 pp. $14.95. Order from Chicago Review Press by calling 312/337-0747.



Turned on to Music

Veteran Canadian classroom teacher and author, John Philips uses music of all types to reach students. In *Classroom Jukebox2*, Philips, also called Jivin' Johnny, mixes more than 200 songs into his lessons, set around various topics. Some of the recording artists and their songs include Joni Mitchell (Big Yellow Taxi), Don Henley (Dirty Laundry), Arlo Guthrie (The City of New Orleans), and Garth Brooks (The River). Lyrics to these songs help kids understand concepts such as character, conflict, symbolism, and satire. $12.95. To order, go to: jjohnnypress.com.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Write An Ad, Make A Difference!

"And Now a Word from our Planet" (sponsored by ZPG's Teachers' PET Project) is a contest that challenges students to sell ideas for a greener Earth. Write a thoughtful script for a 30-second radio ad that creatively shows the connection between human population pressures and one of the following four environmental issues: global warming, habitat loss, pollution, and shortages. The contest has three categories—6-8th grades, 9-10th grades, and 11-12th grades. Each category has a first prize of $1,000 and runner-up prizes of $500. Begin your research at www.awordfromourplanet.org. Send your entry to: A Word from Our Planet Contest, Teachers' PET Project, 1400 16th St., N.W., #320, Washington, DC 20036, or submit online at www.awordfromourplanet.org. All entries must be postmarked by February 15, 2002.

Parental Advisory Program

The Recording Industry Association of America has launched a new campaign to improve awareness about its Parental Advisory program. Designed for parents, educators, and music consumers, the campaign features a new "Parental Advisory Label" brochure for parents, caregivers, and educators; newly designed "Parental Advisory Label" displays in music retail stores; and the creation of a public service announcement by music legend Quincy Jones. Written materials include a Web site, www.parentalguide.org, a one-stop resource for parents and educators to learn about the program, as well as the different ratings systems for television, motion pictures, and video games.

Portraits of America

NEA member Jim Centorino is a physics teacher by day. By night and in his spare time, he is a prolific music composer and accomplished trumpet player. His music is influenced by people, places, and events in his life. *Portraits of America* is his fourth album—a musical journey through the United States from coast to coast. The recent events of September 11 have prompted Jim to donate a portion of the sales of this album to the American Red Cross relief efforts in New York City. CD $15; cassette $10; s&h included, but California residents add 8% sales tax and others add $2. Send orders to Centorino Productions, P.O. Box 4478, West Hills, CA 91308; or E-mail centorino@earthlink.net. You can also visit www.centorino.com.

Little Animals

What is the sound of a bear eating jello? NEA member Mark Weakland knows! And he happily shares it and many other sounds on *Little Animals*, his latest CD for children (and adults). Also included is the award-winning song "Bed Bug Bounce." The music of *Little Animals* teaches children about animals and nature. Teachers have used it to present students with facts about marsupials, dolphins, hibernation, and seasons. Kindergarten teachers have used it as a vehicle for practicing listening and phonological awareness skills. *Little Animals* is both educationally meritorious and fun! $14.99 CD; $11.99 tape. Go to www.springwatermusic.com to listen to some "cuts" of the songs and to order. Or contact Springwater Music Group, 241 Pheasant Road, Hollsopple, PA 15935, phone 814/629-9661.

Keeping Kids Drug Free

To provide parents and caregivers with real-life tips on how to keep kids drug free, the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign has produced a free drug-prevention brochure in collaboration with parents and parenting experts from across the country. Order copies of *Keeping Your Kids Drug-Free: A How To Guide for Parents and Caregivers* by calling 800/788-2800. Request document #PHD884.

What type of investor are you?

Take this NEA Valuebuilder quiz and find out.

Take just a moment and write the numbers corresponding to your answers in the spaces to the right. Add up your score and then match it with the Investor Profile to learn if you're a conservative, moderate or aggressive investor.

NEA Valuebuilder. Program

Risk Pop Quiz

A Of my gross household income, I spend the following percentage on debts like credit card, car payments, rent or mortgage payments:
1. More than 33%
2. Between 10% and 33%
3. Less than 10%

B In case of an emergency, I have savings available to pay:
1. Less than two months of living expenses
2. Two to four months of living expenses
3. Five months or more of living expenses

C The chance that I may lose my job or face a large financial burden in the next year is:
1. Somewhat likely
2. Not very likely
3. Not likely at all

D Regarding the risk of investing, I will change to another investment if:
1. There is any drop in value
2. The value drops by 20% during a given year
3. It doesn't bother me if my investment drops in value. I might even buy more since prices are lower.

E The majority of my money is currently invested in:
1. CDs, Passbook Savings, Money Market Funds or Treasury Bonds
2. Stocks from large corporations, mutual funds that are pretty reliable, or high-quality corporate bonds.
3. Predominantly small company stocks or aggressive mutual funds.

F Regarding my investment objectives:
1. I prefer a guaranteed account, one where my money is absolutely safe, even if it means I earn a lower rate.
2. I want investments that show steady growth. I need to beat inflation so I'm willing to take some risk.
3. I prefer a more aggressive mix of investments, some with moderate growth, but mostly those with higher risk and the chance for higher returns.

Question	Answer
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	
+ F	
Total Score	

Add up your total score and match it with your Investor Profile

Total Score	Investor Profile
6-9	Conservative Investor
10-15	Moderate Investor
16-18	Aggressive Investor

Now, take the next step toward a secure retirement.

Knowing your financial risk tolerance is a good beginning toward preparing for your retirement. Now is the time to take the next important step - **meet with your NEA Valuebuilder representative.** You'll get guidance from a financial professional who can help you match an investment portfolio to your risk tolerance and time horizon.

Receive a FREE Planner. Call now to set up an appointment with an NEA Valuebuilder Representative and you'll receive a free Daily Planner and Retirement Planning Guide (While supplies last). Call toll-free today.

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For more complete information about the *NEA Valuebuilder* Variable Annuity TSA available through the *NEA Valuebuilder* Program, including all charges and expenses, obtain a prospectus from Security Distributors, Inc. and read it carefully before investing.
Variable annuities available through the *NEA Valuebuilder* Program are distributed by Security Distributors, Inc. and issued by Security Benefit Life Insurance Company.
The *NEA Valuebuilder* Mutual Fund TSA is a Custodial Account that makes available various mutual funds for investment. For more complete information about the mutual funds in which the Custodial Account invests, obtain a prospectus from Security Distributors, Inc. and read it carefully before investing.
VBNT0102

Teaching Award

The Freida J. Riley Teacher Award is administered by the Partnership for America's Future, Inc., a non-profit educational organization, to identify and reward an American teacher who overcame tremendous adversity, or made an enormous sacrifice in order to positvely impact students.

In addition to special recognition and other awards, the winner will receive a $5,000 check to be used as the recipient wishes. For official rules, eligibility, selection process, and application materials, go to www.pafinc.com and click on the Freida J. Riley Teacher Award Application. Application forms must arrive at the offices of the Partnership for America's Future, Inc., no later than 5:00 p.m., ET on Friday, March 1, 2002.

Video via the Internet

Teachers Network (www.teachersnetwork.org), with a grant from AT&T Foundation, has developed a series of interactive streaming videos that offer practical instruction for the novice teacher and serve as a form of "digital mentoring." The videos are accompanied by actual grade/course specificlesson plans and also tie in to the online professional development courses for new teachers. View the streaming videos online at www.teachersnetwork.org.

WEB WINNERS

Slavery Fighter

At this site, the Library of Congress presents an interactive timeline and autobiographical works of Frederick

Douglass, the nineteenth-century African-American abolitionist who escaped from slavery and then risked his own freedom by becoming an outspoken antislavery champion. Go to: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/doughtml/.

See the World

Looking for news from all over the world? The WorldNews Network is an online portal to international news.

Arranged in user-friendly categories that range from geographic areas and business to entertainment and science. Another option: try the drop-down menus at the bottom of the page. Go to: www.wnnetwork.com/.

All in a Name

You may be surprised to find out just how many people around the nation share your surname—and

where they live. You can search dates back as far as 1850, and the results appear in a color-coded map. Go to: www.progenealogists.com/surnamestudy.htm.

Some Good News

In these troubled times, when it's easy to get tired of all the bad "news that's fit to print," it may be time to

visit a site that specializes in good news it calls HeroicStories. This site, whose aim is to restore faith in humanity "one story at a time," offers an alternative. Go to:www.heroicstories.com/.

LA Museum Art

Browse through some 10,000 images from the permanent collection of the Los Angeles County Museum

of Art. Just click the Start button to enter a virtual exhibit with items ranging from Japanese art and photography to textiles and costumes. at http://mweb.lacma.org/.

Just the Right Words

Amaze your friends with your encyclopedic knowledge of notable quotables for just about any occasion. BrainyQuote lets you scan more than 30,000 quotes by 8,000 authors from Aristotle to Zappa. Search by topic and author name, or have a daily e-

quote delivered to your inbox. Go to:www.brainyquote.com/.

Puzzles Online

If you love online puzzles then Puzzle Choice is your kind of Web site. Amuse yourself with 20 different types of printable and interactive crosswords, along with word search, trivia tests, and number challenges. Go to: www.puzzlechoice.com/.

Afghan Site

With the nation's attention on the Afghan battlefield, go to the CIA's World Factbook 2001 for a user-

friendly backgrounder on that strife-ridden southern Asian nation. Info on everything from geography to demographics. www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html.

Off to a Good Start

StartSquad boasts that it is the very best place to start for children, parents, librarians, and teachers seeking

age-appropriate Web sites selected and organized by professionally trained librarians. Go to: www.startsquad.org/.

Desirable Destination

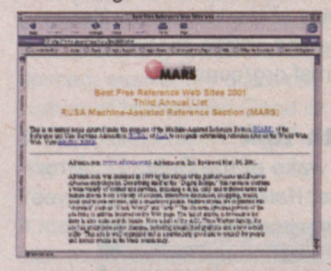
Recover from the holidays by getting fit, with the help of the online version of *Health* magazine. Includes tips on how to deal with food, weight, and beauty concerns. Go to www.health.

com/cgi-bin/current/home/index.cgi.

Before you take advantage of today's low-cost travel fares, visit the world's top destinations online with the help of this multi-faceted Cities Guide. Use an interactive map or a drop-down menu. Go to: www.economist.com/cities/.

Librarians' Choice

Put your own library on your desktop. The Best Free Reference Web Sites 2001 listings include online resources



that are recognized as outstanding by the nation's librarians. At www.ala.org/rusa/mars/best 2001.html.

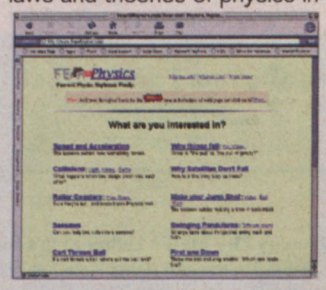
Phobias Defined

Do you suffer from sesquipedalophobia? Or maybe myrmecophobia? At last, you can get a definition for

those and other multisyllabic fears at the aptly named Phobia List. (Admittedly not much of a help for cyberphobes.) Go to: http://phobialist.com/.

Top Notch Physics

Are your students baffled by physics? This destination explains the basic laws and theories of physics in easy-



to-understand language and multimedia clips. Topics covered include speed and accelerations, collisions, roller coasters, seesaws, planet rotation, friction, sound, Doppler effect, zero gravity, atoms, and more. Plus, the site's creators recently added an online quiz generator to assess students' knowledge. Go to: www.fearofphysics.com.

Money, Money

Our currency—money—tells a story about our country's history. This fascinating online exhibit starts with colonial currency from 1776 and continues through today's green backs and tomorrow's smart cards. Each bill

is accompanied by a short historical note to place it into context, notes on

the artists who created it, plus the meanings of the interwoven literary devices and artistic accents. Go to www.frbsf.org/currency/.

Health Talk

In the wake of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, Kaisernetwork.org serves

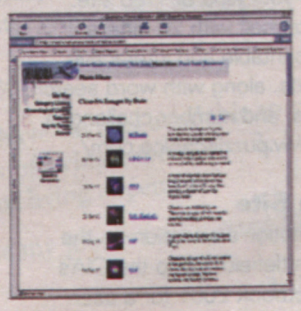
up special coverage of the issues and debates now shaping health policy. Includes links to online resources, Webcasts and reports. Go to: www.kaisernetwork.org/specialcoverage/9_11.cfm.

Baseball: America's National Pasttime

Baseball lovers' labor of love: An online portfolio of hundreds of digital photos of baseball stadiums and ballparks from major to minor to independent leagues, including defunct and rare baseball stadiums and ballparks from all across North America. Go to: www.digitalballparks.com/.

Black Hole Explained

NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory catches a glimpse of the supermas-



sive black hole at the center of our galaxy, about 2.6 million times the mass of our Sun. Just one of the many images at this out-of-this-world photo gallery. Log on to: http://chandra.harvard.edu/photo/chronological.html.

Feel the Power

The One World Journeys team offers a 10-day multimedia expedition

across the coastal waters and rivers of British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest, *Salmon: Spirit of the Land and Sea*, a photo-documentary focusing on the mind-blowing journey of the Pacific wild salmon. Go to: www.owj.com/salmon/index.html.

Space Photos

NASA's Galileo spacecraft adds Jupiter's moon Callisto to its gallery

of breathtaking images. Described as a spiky landscape of bright ice and dark dust. Go to: www.jpl.nasa.gov/images/callisto/.

Snail Mail

Travel back to the days before E-mail with a visit to the Bath Postal

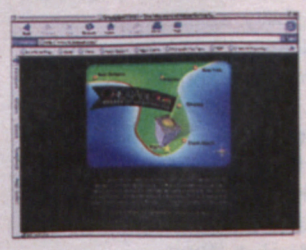
Museum, which presents backgrounders and artifacts dating back to Egypt's earliest days of snail mail. A virtual hoot. Go to: www.bathpostalmuseum.org/.

All History

The History Channel invites you to send an historical E-card, listen to a famous speech, or check out what happened "this day in history" in various fields. Go to: www.historychannel.com/.

Toy Story

Take an amusing tour through the Museum of Advertising Icons' collec-



tion. Hundreds of pop culture giants are represented. Go to: www.toymuseum.com/.

Foreign Language

Need a quick translation of a foreign word or passage? Babel Fish is one place to start for translation from Chinese, French, German, Italian, or Japanese into English or vice versa. Don't look for complete technical accuracy, but the translations are readable and this free site can handle several paragraphs at once or even entire Web pages. Go to: babelfish.altavista.com/translate.dyn.

Reference Desk

Students looking for a good all-purpose reference site may want to try what many say is the best all-round site, www.refdesk.com. Here you can start your research by using the Facts Subject Index for information about grammar, plus thousands

DIVERSITY Calendar

January

January 21—Martin Luther King's Birthday
Celebrating the civil rights leader, minister, and winner of the 1964 Nobel Prize. Born in Atlanta on Janury 15, 1929; assasinated April 4, 1968. A federal holiday celebrated on the third Monday of January. Go to: http://thekingcenter.com/tkc.html.

Lunar New Year
A festive holiday celebrated for about two weeks. The Lunar New Year is observed by the Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese. The event takes place during the first three days of the first lunar month (late January or early February). People dress up in costumes, exchange food and gifts, visit family members, and remember ancestors. They settle all business accounts and forget all grudges. Each year is symbolized by a different animal. 2002 is the Year of the Black Horse. For information about how Koreans celebrate the Lunar New Year, go to: www.clickasia.co.kr/about/h0101.htm.

February

Black History Month
Black History Month is the successor to Negro History Week, which was initiated on February 12, 1926, by Carter G. Woodson, a pre-eminent historian and founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson was concerned that the contributions of Black Americans were overlooked or misrepresented, and he began lobbying for Negro History Week as early as 1915. He selected February because it included the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and Frederick Douglass (February 14), whom he believed had dramatically impacted the lives of Black Americans.

In 1976, Woodson's legacy, now renamed the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, successfully lobbied to extend Black History Week into a month-long observance.

Writing Black USA provides numerous links to important works by Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Malcolm X, and many others. Go to: www.keele.ac.uk/depts/as/Literature/amlit.black.html.

Resources

of links to other reference sites including the Library of Congress's guide to online legal information.

Finding Your Way Around

Students in need of a good site for geographic references, should try

this site. It offers political and geographic maps of the world or a partiuclar country. With each map they'll find demographic, economic, and historical information. Go to: www.atlapedia.com.

Beware the Net

Don't believe everything you read on the Internet. This site will reinforce

healthy skepticism in your students about using Internet information. Go to: www.media-awareness.ca. Plus, there's a handy list of trustworthy resources to use.

Modern-Day Merck

The Merck Manual has been around a long time, but this is the new

Merck Manual for the new century. Still, this site is a lot like the print version, full of articles on various diseases, lots of animation, illustrations, photos, and a powerful search engine to find specific information more easily. Go to: www.merckhomeedition.com.

Prescription Help

Also on the health front, a site that will explain what is in the drugs your

doctor prescribes for you. There is an online index, with information on thousands of drugs and herbal suplements. Go to: www.rxlist.com.

Hearing and Seeing

Here's a site that offers a quick way to find information from audio and video recordings—everything from radio and TV to the Internet—and the site is searchable. There is also a fast-forward feature. Go to: www.speechbot.com.

JUST OUT

Revamped Space Day Site

With the Mars Odyssey mission on the verge of transmitting new images of the red planet to earth this year, now is an opportune time for educators to learn about Spaceday.com, the newly revamped Web site for Space Day 2002...Adventure to Mars! While many educators are aware of the Design Challenges program for 4th-8th graders, now is the time to learn about the range of Mars-related resources at www.spaceday.com.

The Space Day educational initiative will culminate with a global celebration on May 2, 2002. Space Day's unique Web site, designed to spark kids' interest in science, math, and technology through the wonders of space, enhances the program's educational role. Spaceday.com serves as a gateway to hundreds of Mars/space-related sites. It's also fun to use.

Defining Good Teacher-Leaders

In an economy filled with surprise and uncertainty, being an effective leader means being a good teacher. But how do you lead and teach at the same time? Who are your most important students? And what about recess? Read this interesting out-of-the-classroom article on teaching, learning, and organizational leadership. Go to: www.fastcompany.com/online/53/teaching.html.

Building Character

The 1950s "Leave it to Beaver" notion of character—even if it were true back then—is certainly not true today. Children are changing, schools are changing, and education is changing. The shifting mores of American children and schools make character education especially crucial in today's classrooms. Read a provocative article about character education and its application in the classroom. www.ascd.org/readingroom/classlead/0110/2Oct01.html.

School Photos: A Changing Scene

School-age children don their favorite outfits, their hair fixed, and practice their smiles in anticipation of annual picture day. And unlike decades ago, when school pictures were composed of dull poses captured against boring backgrounds, today's school pictures have flair, with interesting backgrounds. Colors range from basic blue to vivid colors like "hot pink," "emerald," and "cerulean." School photographers are now taught how to work with children. School photographers say that school photography has been forced to adjust to more discerning parents. Go to: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A4872-2001Nov9.html.

BellSouth Grants

The BellSouth Foundation awards Opportunity Grants once a year in late winter/early spring. Opportunity Grants are available for unsolicited proposals that may not fit within the parameters of a specific BellSouth Foundation initiative, but that appear likely to add value to the Foundation's work within that priority area. The BellSouth Foundation focuses its grants primarily toward education reform activities that will have an impact on a substantial number of students. Concepts due March 1, 2002. Go to: www.bellsouthfoundation.org/grants/og/index.html.

Lessons Learned

Parents dread it: the phone call from school. Few things can sink the spirits of a parent faster than a teacher's or principal's call saying a son or daughter is not doing well in a particular subject or is acting up. But partnering with the teachers and counselors is the best thing parents can do to ensure their children's success. Read this interesting column from a parent who spent a day in school. Go to: www.indystar.com/print/opinion/tue/articles/ecolcissell06.html.

Totally Wired

Faced with the challenge that 90 percent of all classrooms in the United States do not have a telephone, and that many schools are unable to install computer and phone lines due to aging buildings and the danger of asbestos, the Wireless Foundation created ClassLink. Through ClassLink, Nokia and CTIA wireless carriers donate wireless phones and airtime to schools in order to accelerate learning and prepare children's classrooms for the 21st century. Schools are selected to receive phones through an application process, which is reviewed by a panel of independent judges representing the wireless industry and academic institutions. Go to: www.wirelessfoundation.org/03class/index.htm.

Latest Grants

For information about grant programs, funding sources, and technology funding, go to: www.eschoolnews.com/resources/funding/.

Kids Philosophy Slam

The Philosophy Slam asks kids to write about their personal experiences regarding the question "Is the Nature of Humankind Good or Evil?" Any student from 1st grade through 12th grade can enter, and there is no entry fee or form. In 500 words or less, preferably typed and double spaced, answer the question: "Is the Nature of Humankind Good or Evil?" If humankind's nature is good, explain why; if it is evil, describe why. Younger kids from grades 1 through 4 may paint or draw a picture to express their feelings or ideas about the topic, or may include words or write a short story, or use any creative combination of words and pictures. Please read all rules before writing and submitting your entry. Postmark deadline and deadline for online entries is January 21, 2002. Entries must be clearly labeled with: name, age, grade, teacher, school, school address, and school number, and e-mail. Unless entering online, mail all entries to: Kids Philosophy Slam, P.O. Box 406, Lanesboro MN 55949. Go to: philosophyslam.org.

Free Resource

The Public Education Network (PEN) Weekly NewsBlast is a free E-mail newsletter featuring school reform and school fundraising resources. The PEN NewsBlast is the property of the Public Education Network, a national association of 66 local education funds working to improve public school quality in low-income communities nationwide. For more information about PEN, go to: www.publiceducation.org/.

Increasing Family Income Yields Results

For children living in poverty, future success in social skills and school readiness can increase dramatically with just a small increase in economic resources, according to a study from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. For children in a family of four living in poverty, an increase in economic resources of $13,400 over three years helped the children score as well as those in families with twice the income. There have been numerous studies comparing the educational skills of the impoverished to those of children whose families are more well off, but this study is the first to note what happens to children in poverty when economic resources are increased. Go to: www.boston.com/dailyglobe2/323/metro/lincome_boost_I inked_to_learningi%2B.shtml.

in the Light Lane

How Times Have Changed

I teach elementary music in a multicultural school where many children come from one-parent families.

In a recent third grade music class, the students were learning about the composer Bach. I said to the students, "Well, I know something about Mr. Bach that is not in your textbook. Mr. Bach had TWENTY children."

One third grade boy said with shock, "WOW! He must have had to pay a lot of money in child support." I stifled my desire to laugh, but also realized how much times have changed since Bach's day.

Brenda Payne
Zion, Illinois

In kindergarten, in preparation for Columbus Day, we were discussing Columbus and the three ships—the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria.

As we walked down the hallway for dismissal, the children always look at the older students' artwork hanging on the wall.

One day, a student exclaimed, "Look, the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria!" We stopped walking and I asked, "Whose ships are they?" One of the students proudly answered, "Ohio's!"

Susan Timlin
Clairton, Pennsylvania

The first week of school I asked my sixth graders to write about themselves. One student wrote, " I'm enjoying all my classes and teachers. I especially love jim."

Mary Kinzer
Birmingham, Missouri

I try to encourage diversity appreciation, but one day it seemed to have gone too far. I asked a group of English-language learners to predict what their lives would be like ten years in the future.

One Asian boy wrote that he would be married. Probing for details, I asked him to describe his future wife.

He wrote, "She will be kind and beautiful, but I don't know if she will be Korean or American—I don't care what species she is." Needless to say, we had an impromptu vocabulary lesson.

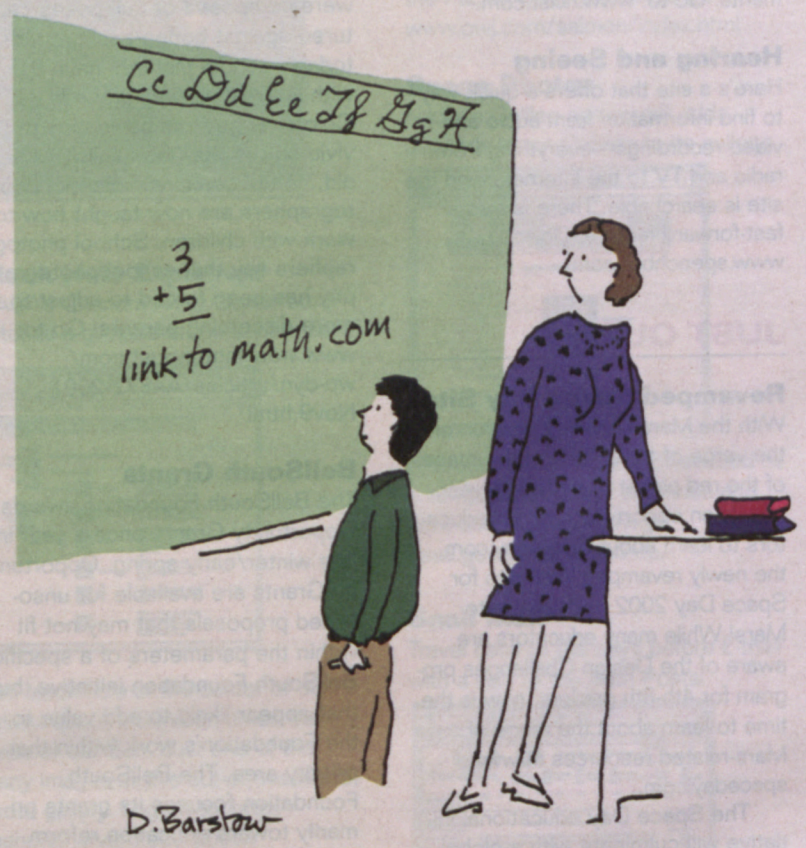
Glori Smith
Provo, Utah

As part of a review of a literature lesson about an oceanographer and the ocean, I brought in an audiotape of ocean sounds.

Our third graders listened intently as we passed around shells and ocean artifacts. When the tape was finished, I asked them if they could identify any of the sounds that they heard.

Several said they heard whale calls, waves crashing, and sea gulls. One boy raised his hand and gleefully added, "They're called 'sea gulls' because they live in the sea. If they lived in the bay, they would be called 'bagels'!"

Judy Lagen
Roseville, California



When reading about Anne Sullivan (Helen Keller's tutor) in my fourth grade class, the story refered to Anne as a "yankee girl." I stopped and asked the class what they thought a "yankee girl" was? One boy replied, "She's a baseball girl."

Sara Moore
Laguna Hills, California

Several years ago, I was teaching at a junior high school in Connecticut. One day when I was collecting homework, one of my students said that he had left his homework in his locker.

Knowing that his locker was on the other side of the school where the teachers' mailboxes were located, I suggested that he could leave his homework in my mailbox.

He said, "But Mr. Litevich, I don't know where you live."

John Litevich
Killingworth, Connecticut

While teaching a unit on short stories, I asked on a quiz for the definition of "point of view."

One student apparently did not grasp the concept because her definition read, "Point of view is what the person in the story thinks of the person who is reading the story."

Stacy Whited
Cookeville, Tennessee

I teach first grade and one day I asked my students if they remembered what the seasons were. Promptly, a little girl in my class perked up and said, "Deer season and bird season Mrs. Brady!"

Kami Brady
Havre, Montana

Got Laughs?

● Have a funny school story, anecdote, or vignette you'd like to share with other NEA members? You can send contributions to "In the Light Lane," NEA Today, 1201 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. Fax: 202/822-7206. Send E-mail to neatoday@nea.org.

● Want a classroom chuckle delivered to your E-mail box once a week? Subscribe to the new "In the Light Lane" mailing list. Just send an E-mail to join-lightlane@list.nea.org (no subject or message needed).

Sounds like the 18th century

My middle school orchestra students listen to classical music each week and then write a reflection. I thought one student had written a fairly thoughtful response to Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* until the last sentence: "I think this piece was written in the 1700's."

Julia Black
St. Louis, Missouri

I am a reading specialist, and one morning I was administering a phonemic awareness test to a first grader. I have them echo a word I have said and they have to manipulate the word somehow—whether it is changing the initial consonant, changing medial sound, a syllable, removing a phoneme, etc.

For the sample item the teacher says, "Say steamboat" and the child says "steamboat." Then the teacher says, "Say steamboat but don't say boat." The child, of course, should reply "steam."

We reached a particular item and I said to the first grader, "Say cucumber." He said "cucumber." Then I said, "Now say 'cucumber' but don't say 'cu.' "He thought and thought and confidently replied, 'Pickle.'"

Jeanine Heil
Doylestown, Pennsylvania

One of the students in my sixth grade honors science class got wind of the fact that I am a former attorney and once worked for the government—bringing juvenile offenders to justice in the courtroom.

One day he raised his hand and asked, "Mr. Keen, is it true that you used to prostitute kids?" I let a beat go by, and then said with an absolutely straight face, "Jonathan, could the word you are looking for possibly be ... 'prosecute?'" He replied, "Yeah, that's it!"

Since I could just imagine one of them going home and making the same mistake when telling their parents, I assured everybody that there was a very big difference between the two words!

Roger Keen
West Hills, California

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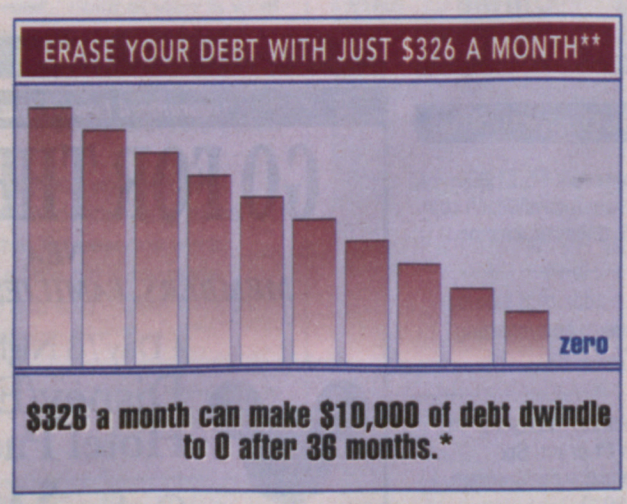

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